# Amaris Yew

PROMPT "blackhaired vampire princess"

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#DreamDiffusion

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# Chapter 1

She was different from the other girls.

She was perfect. He had been unable to think of anything else since he had first seen her. From the moment his eyes flickered over her as she passed by in the hall, he was in love.  She was taller than most, but in a pleasing sort of way. Her long, black hair fell across her shoulders and down her back in a messy sort of style that made her look as if she had just crawled out of bed. Her lips were a bright, glossy red, and her eyes had a focused, sharp look about them. A mere look was all it took for his heart to start beating in his chest.

He didn't know her name, or anything else about her. They had no classes together, and Mike was reluctant to bring up his interest in her with his friends. The girl had a bit of an intimidating air about her. Plenty of guys looked her way as she passed, but no one Mike knew of had even come close to speaking with her.

He decided that he would be the first.

He had no idea where she would hang out before classes began. He wandered around for a bit, trying to rationalize just where she would spend her early morning hours. His mind began to wander as he entered the library. He began to fantasize about what he would say to her, and what she would do in return. He turned the corner and found her standing in between a row of books, her head bent over a particularly old novel.

Mike froze, completely taken aback. He had not expected to see her here like this. She did not look up, and Mike found himself taking a deep breath and stepping closer to her…

"Hi!"

Mike flinched, and shirked away, making as if an interesting book had caught his eye. From the girl's other side a bright eyed, blonde girl with glasses, shorter than his girl, stepped up to her, smiling widely.

The girl looked up at her. Mike could not see her face from this angle, but the blonde girl's smile faded a little as she did.

“Um, that’s a good book, isn’t it?” The blonde girl asked. Her previous confident tone rose to a strange, nervous high pitch. “I read it last year for a project, and I absolutely loved it-“

The black haired girl spoke, so quietly that Mike could not make out the specific words. The blonde nodded energetically. “It is, isn’t it?” She asked happily. She seemed to have regained her enthusiasm. “Um, your name is Amaris, right…?”

The book closed with a snap. The girl’s eyes widened in surprise and she took a step back. The black haired girl, Amaris, said nothing as she turned around. Mike quickly stepped out of the way as she went billowing past, leaving the little blonde haired girl in her wake.

“Well excuse me.” The girl huffed, a little annoyed, and walked off. Mike was not really paying attention. He was watching the black haired girl step back out into the hall and out of sight.

Amaris. So that was her name. It was an unusual one, that was for sure. He doubted she had born around here. If nothing else, he had at least learned her name.

He began to tell the story of what he had seen to his friends, although he tried to keep his interest in Amaris casual. Most had never even seen her and had no idea who he was talking about, but those who had were reluctant to talk about her.

“Amaris…” May murmured to herself, as she stared down at her paper, tapping her pen against her bandaged head. She had come back from a trip from Japan with her boyfriend with a number of injuries that she had refused to explain. “I’ve heard the name.” She frowned. “But nothing positive.”

May was not the gossipy sort, Mike knew. She looked almost uncomfortable as she began to recall some of the stories she had heard about that girl.

“She is very…. Cold.” May recalled. “I’ve heard that she blows people off like that all the time.” She wiggled her arm awkwardly, a favorite gesture of hers. “She’s quite beautiful, though. I wish I had her hair.”

Those who were able to tell him anything at all seemed to agree. She was incredibly beautiful, but strange. No one had ever spoke to her. No one knew anything about her really. The talk about her was beginning to make his head spin. It was becoming a bit overwhelming. He was beginning to regret even  asking.

But despite how often he was warned about her character, despite how many stories he was told or how many people told him the story of how she had made their 57 year old Army Veteran gym teacher cry, he still found his eyes straying over to her every time she passed by. She never looked his way, not ever. But he found that he didn't mind. He wasn't sure what he would do if she did.

He was beginning to realize that she did not speak to anyone if she could help it. She often passed by anyone who spoke to her without a word, leaving disgruntled people in her wake. It was not just students she had a tendency to blow off. Amaris seemed to give her teachers the same treatment. Once a teacher had followed her into the hall to ask her about an essay she had written, and Amaris just walked right past her. The teacher, Mike eventually learned, had thought that Amaris should have entered the essay into some contest in hopes of winning a potential scholarship.

She was, he was told, extremely intelligent. She was fluent in so many languages Mike could not even keep track of them all. French, Spanish, German, Russian, Japanese, Mandarin, Korean… and if the rumors were true, she spoke several others that she got absolutely no use out of. She always tended to walk around with exotic foreign novels with alphabets that Mike and the others could not even really place, let alone read or appreciate.

She did not play sports, which surprised him. She had a great ass. She was, he was told, not all that interested in athletics. Whenever she had been forced to play something, like in a gym class, she had done fairly well for herself, despite seemingly not putting in much effort. Both the Volleyball Team and Tennis team had approached her and asked her to try out, but she declined. She was not interested in being competitive, but she showed promise. She was,

Mike heard, probably the most misused potential their girls athletic program had seen in a long time.

No one, however, seemed to have any idea as to what she did after school. She had no friends, no one knew her parents, or where she lived. She just turned up in the morning, went to class, and then left. Whether she went home or somewhere else, no one could say.

Which was why Mike decided it was time to find out for himself. He was not following her home. Not really. Definitely not. He would never do that. That would have been weird. He was merely heading down the same way she went after school. It was true he would not normally go down this way, but he was beginning to feel as if it was about time for him to make a real move. She was downright unapproachable during school. Perhaps she would be a little bit more relaxed outside of it. To this day he had never even seen her smile.

She did not turn around as she walked down the sidewalk, her long black hair flowing behind her in the wind. Mike stared at it, completely entranced. He had never seen such beautiful black hair in all his life.

It was a bright, warm, sunny day. Mike was feeling pretty positive about the way things were looking so far.

She stopped at a street crossing and stared at the light at the other end. A small, glowing stop light was on the other end. Perfect. Mike quickened his pace and stepped up next to her, as if he were merely waiting to cross. He tried not to look at her. He really did try. He did not want to make what he was doing too obvious. But after a couple of seconds, he had to take a glance.

She was staring at him. He flinched, pulling away slightly at the cold, accusing stare. He could feel his heart seize up in his chest.

The light changed.

Amaris turned her head back and stepped across the street. Mike stared after her, unable to move. He had not been expecting her to be so openly hostile before he had even spoken to her. It had taken

him completely aback. Never in his life had a girl so intimidated him. He could suddenly understand why people were so wary of her.

She had reached the other side of the street and left his sight. Mike watched her go, trying to make sense of his mixed feelings. There was something about her that made him not want to look her directly in the face, but for whatever reason, he was still tempted to chase after her anyway.

He could not explain it, but he felt annoyed with himself, not with her, as she left his line of sight. He should have spoken to her. He should have made her laugh. He should have smiled at her. He should have done something.

He was going to do something. Next time.

He turned around and walked back to the school, already wondering just how he was going to handle their next encounter. Maybe he would read one of her books. Hopefully they all had English versions…

He didn't see her again for a couple of weeks after that. He had at first suspected that she was actively avoiding him now, which depressed him, but the talk around him soon convinced him otherwise. Amaris had stopped coming to school, and no one was sure why. Mike heard all kinds of theories. She ran off with an older guy, she dropped out, her Mother pulled her out to be homeschooled, she left to travel Europe.

Depression gave way to worry. Although they had never really spoken, Mike found himself thinking about her a lot when he should have been working. Where was she? What was she doing? Was she in trouble?

… If she was, could that be why she was so mean to everyone?

"Don't make excuses for her." Taylor told him, exasperatedly, when he shared his theory with her. She raised her American History book over his head and smacked him with it. "She's a cunt, end of story." Her eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Why are you so interested in her, anyway?"

He was being stupid, he realized one day as he stepped into school. He was trying to find ways to justify Amaris' behavior. He shouldn't be doing that, she didn't mean anything to him. She probably hadn't given him a second thought since she had-

"Amaris!"

She was standing right there in front of him. Mike had blurted her name out without thinking, and she looked up at him. She almost looked surprised for a second, before her gaze hardened. It was the same cold look she had given him the other day. But that one, surprised look was all he needed to see. She was just another girl after all. Somehow the realization made him feel a little more confident.

"It's you." She said, in a patronizing, dismissive sort of way. Mike could tell that she expected him to back off, and a part of him wanted to do just that. But instead he stepped closer, letting his natural curiosity take over.

"Where have you been?" He asked her, tilting his head to the side. "Everyone was worried about you."

Amaris raised her hand and clutched the arm on the other side of her body in a defensive sort of gesture. "Everyone?" She repeated. "Or just you?" She sounded condescending, but Mike stood his ground. She was not that scary. She was just a really hot chick. Despite how fast his heart was beating in his chest, he knew that he could do this.

"I was worried too." He admitted. "Are you alright?"

She turned her head away from him. "Girls don't like stalkers." She murmured. She stepped away from him, down the hall. Mike was almost tempted to follow her again, but resisted. That had gone better than the last time. And better than he could have hoped, at any rate.

He tried catching her eye every time they passed each other in the halls, but he was always ignored. People around him were starting to notice, and tease him a little, but Mike tried to brush off the jokes.

"You're a masochist." Taylor told him, over lunch. "She obviously hates you and you love it."

"She never said she HATES me…" Mike said defensively.

Taylor groaned. "God, you're pathetic." She told him, as she bit down on her sandwich. Mike was not sure he disagreed. Amaris had been nothing but rude to him, but he found himself becoming increasingly enamored with her every day.

One day Mike had left class to go to the bathroom, and had run into Amaris heading in the opposite direction. He brightened up considerably as he saw her approach.

"Oh, hey…" He began, trying to stop her.

She brushed past him without a word. Her hand accidently brushed against his arm, and Mike felt a cold chill run down his spine. She looked as if she was in a hurry. Mike watched her go, completely nonplussed, as she stepped outside into the sun. Students were not allowed to leave class during the day…

Curious, Mike decided to forego his bathroom trip and follow her out. It was just too much of a temptation to resist. He stepped out after her, carefully looking around the premises for any sign of where she had gone.

She was not walking across the parking lot, so that meant she had gone around the building. He stepped around the building, and he heard Amaris' voice coming some distance away.

He walked towards it to find a small alley in between the buildings. Amaris was standing there, her back to him. He pressed himself against the wall outside the alley and watched her. She was staring upward, towards the solid brick wall that ended the alley.

"Come out." She said. "I know you're there."

Mike almost did so, but before he could someone else answered.

"Ah, you are as insightful as they say, my dear."

Mike stared as the wall seemed to give way to a pitch black darkness that seemed to go on forever. Out from this darkness a dark skinned

man stepped forward, staring forward at Amaris. He was tall, and powerful looking, and terrifying. His clothes were sparse and primitive, and he wore adornments that seemed to be made of the bones of small animals. In his hand he carried a large stick, that glowed with an unusual light.

Mike recoiled in fright, completely missing what Amaris said next. The man laughed at her words.

"You are an interesting one, my dear." He said. "I have seen for myself just how much of a threat you can be. I am interested in seeing how much more you can take."

"I will stop at nothing until you lay dead at my feet." Amaris said coldly. The man laughed again.

"I'm afraid I will not allow you the chance." He told her. "I do, in fact, have other plans." He slammed his stick into the ground, and raised a long finger at Amaris.

"Hear me now, my dear." He said. "You will never eat again."

Amaris took a step forward as the blackness began to overtake him again. "And what exactly is that supposed to mean?" She asked him, in the most aggressive tone that Mike had ever heard. It was an almost guttural growl. It seemed almost inhuman.

The man laughed again before the darkness overtook him completely, Amaris stood there, staring at the wall with an intense glare, before turning on her heel and marching back.

Mike froze as she walked past. She did not even glance at him, but Mike could tell she knew that he was there. She simply did not care.

"If you know what is good for you, you will say nothing of this to anyone."

Before he could even respond she had marched away, her long black hair flowing behind her. Mike, after the initial shock of being addressed passed, chased after her.

"Amaris, wait…"

She turned. Mike stopped in his tracks.

Amaris was somehow more beautiful and more terrible than he had ever seen her before. Her long, flowing black hair billowed to her right side in a wave. Her eyes were a striking, horrible red, and they were staring at him with an incredible ferocity.

*Her eyes weren't red before. They were black, weren't they?*

"I will not ask you again, stalker." Amaris said. "Keep this up and I will be forced to take action." Mike found himself seizing up. His heart was beating out of his chest. She didn't like him. She would never like him. She was too good for him. And they both knew it.

No… Mike told himself. If he backed down now, he would regret it for the rest of his life. When would have ever even see a woman like Amaris Yew again, let alone talk to one face to face? It was now or never.

Mike stepped forward. He could not let her intimidate him. He wouldn't.

"Action?" He asked, trying to keep his voice coy. "A kiss…?"

What the fuck was he doing? He had no idea. Amaris glowered at him hatefully before brushing her hair back with her hand. Her eyes were once more her usual, beautiful black.

"I have underestimated you, stalker." Amaris said. "I often forget just how stupid your kind can be."

He took another step forward, smiling hopefully at her. "You like stupid?"

She turned away. "No."

And she was off. Mike's heart fell in his chest. What had come over him? That wasn't like him at all. He had not been intimidated by her this time. He had forced himself to approach her again. But he ended up making himself look like an idiot.

Why? He had only just realized now that she was gone, that he had never gotten a proper answer out of her. Just who was that man? And just what did he have to do with Amaris?

…

Amaris could not focus. She had been too worried for the past several weeks. Once again it seemed as if they had managed to track her down to this town in the middle of nowhere. Once again they managed to find her, even in this place. Once again she would have to flee and find somewhere else.

But how? When? And where?

She could not stay here for much longer, that was for certain. She could not keep up the façade for much longer. Plenty of people were already asking too many questions about her background, where she lived and who her parents were, among a number of other things things. But she was still not ready to go back and challenge them head on. She had still not recovered her powers from the last attempt…

She touched her stomach and twitched with pain. At her current rate of recovery she would not be fully healed for another several years. She did not have the confidence to take them on again for real until she was at full strength, but she was finding it increasingly impossible to focus on her health while maintaining a low profile. For every step she took in recovering her vitality, another battle forced her two steps back.

"Amaris."

She was snapped out of her reverie by the smiling face of the little blonde girl with glasses. "What?"

"I was wondering…" The girl's tone was casual, but Amaris knew what she wanted. She was almost as bad as the stalker. Amaris found herself cutting her off before she could speak further.

"No, I don't want to go out with you." Amaris said coldly. "Stop expecting me to change my mind."

The girl's face fell as Amaris stood up and stepped past the table. The teacher opened his mouth to stop her, but she ignored him as she stepped out into the hallway.

It was time to go. People around her were starting to suspect that there was something horribly wrong with her. She could deal with

boys and girls trying to ask her out, but teachers trying to assert their authority over her was something else entirely. Especially if they tried to contact her nonexistent parents. It was nothing out of her control, but the confrontation that morning made her feel as if it was best to disappear again for a couple of weeks. Another battle was coming, and she doubted she would be able to maintain the façade when it arrived. By the time she returned home that day, she was thinking of nothing else.

She had bought a small house for herself entirely by phone. She had two legal identities she was using at the moment. One a seventeen year old schoolgirl, one an older woman in her mid thirties. She far more resembled a seventeen year old, a fact that everyone who met her while under the other identity tended to notice. She only used the older identity when absolutely necessary, such as when she needed to buy a home or deal with taxes, anything that a younger woman should not have to do herself.

She entered her kitchen, which was filled with cobwebs and dust. She imagined that a normal person would be able to tell that it had never been used. If she was really going to leave this house behind, she may as well do it properly. She got out a rag and some spray and began cleaning the place. She was naturally a tidy, organized person, and it was not long until the cobwebs gave way to a bright, shiny kitchen.

She really did prefer the cobwebs, but something about standing over an impeccably clean, bright kitchen made her feel accomplished. Perhaps it was because she did not clean often, but she often found herself enjoying it. If she did have to leave the house in a hurry, at least she would be able to sell it without arousing too much suspicion about what exactly she had been doing with it.

She stepped into her living room and sat down on her favorite chair. A book was laying on the coffee table next to it, but Amaris did not pick it up right away. Once again her mind was on the enemy, and what he had said to her.

“I’m never going to eat again…?” She repeated. “What the fuck does that mean?”

She shook her head. Hanging around those brats at school had really done a number on her vocabulary. She could not wait to leave this place. She waved her hand and the curtains blocking the sunlight outside slid open, filling the dark room with light.

She stared out the window, half expecting to see some sign of the enemy again. He surely knew where she lived by now. She imagined he had tried to rattle her by threatening her in person. It would have scared most people out of their wits. She was not most people.

A knock came at her door. She narrowed her eyes as she got to her feet. She brushed her long hair with her hand as she stepped to the door. This was it. He had come after all. She bared her teeth threateningly as she opened the door-

“Hi Amaris!” Mike said cheerfully, waving his hand in greeting. She slammed the door in his face and turned around, hand over her mouth. What the fuck was he doing here? Cursing to herself, she forced her expression into a neutral one as she slowly opened the door again. He was still standing there, smiling that stupid grin. Who had told him where she had lived? And why was he not going away?

…He had followed her home, hadn’t he? Aggravated, she immediately ripped the door back open and glared at him.

Once again he did not seem particularly intimidated by her glare. In fact he looked rather happy to see her. That only made her angrier. He was one of THOSE people. The more openly hostile she became, the more desensitized he became. He had been following her around so much lately that he had gotten used to her dark glares and cold words.

“What do you want?” Amaris asked, already suspecting that she may have to resort to violence.

“I wanted to ask if you wanted to see a movie-“

She slammed the door in his face again. What an idiot. She had stepped away from the door when another knock came.

She opened it again.

“You didn’t say no.”

“No.”

She shut it, this time much more gently, and then headed back to her book. He was annoying, far more so than most people who took a shine to her. If he kept this up, he would follow her around the country. The last thing she needed was some thirsty kid following her to her next destination. Perhaps next time she would go to Mexico.

She touched her wound again, wincing. Going to Mexico would bring its own host of problems. She had plenty of enemies there as well, ones who would not take to her presence kindly.

It would not do to blindly wander into a situation worse than the one she was currently in. No, she would deal with this new enemy, and the boy too if she had to. But she could not leave the States. Not yet. Not until she was ready.

The Brides of Dracula would someday fall at her feet. And she would take her throne.

School was exceptionally dull. The main reason she attended was to keep up appearances. It was not altogether difficult, or it shouldn’t have been. Her looks got her a lot of attention from all sorts of people, and that bothered her to her core. She had never been a social person, even before she had realized she was different than most people, and as she aged she found herself growing increasingly impatient with the inane problems of everyone around her.

“Wow, Amaris… Is that a first edition?”

Amaris shifted in her seat, bored, as the blonde girl from yesterday leaned in over her, eyes shining. She was staring at the book on her desk enraptured. “That has to be over a hundred years old!”

“A hundred and fifty.” Amaris corrected her, rolling her eyes. She had several in her collection. The girl’s eyes bugged out.

“You bring something that old to SCHOOL?”

There was no reason for her not to. She had every book in her collection enchanted to last forever, if need be. It still looked just as splendid as when she had picked it off the shelf in London, in 1858.

Her heart ached for a brief moment. It did not seem all that long ago at all. She used to be able to travel wherever she liked, eat whatever she wanted, and do anything her heart desired. But things had changed drastically since then.

"What's wrong?" The girl asked curiously, as she leaned in closer. "Is there a heart in there after all?"

She was close. Too close. Amaris' almost felt herself reaching forward and stroking her hair. The temptation to bite her right then and there in front of everyone overwhelmed her for a moment.

Instead she simply shook her head. "No, nothing is wrong." She said quietly. "I was just thinking about how I first got it, that's all."

She hated being sentimental, but it worked. The girl pulled away from her and Amaris felt herself relax. That had been too close.

"Oh, is it personal?" The girl asked curiously, her head tilted. "A family heirloom, maybe…?"

She was trying to get personal again. This girl was just as thirsty as the stalker. Amaris stood up and walked away, book in hand, not even offering a response. If she had a beating heart, it would be beating wildly. She had come very, very close to showing her true colors in front of everyone.

She could not risk making an enemy out of the United States as well. Ravaging a girl, no matter how thirsty and annoying, would not sit well with them. The last thing she needed was the authorities to appeal to Praetor Americana, or Alethea, or a Vampire Hunter from the Order of the Dragon… or worse yet decide to ally themselves with her enemies to eliminate her.

No, she had to restrain herself. She still had to eat, of course.  But she did so sparingly. It was very likely a factor in her slow rate of recovery. She was not taking in enough energy to heal as she should have. She had been eating rather conservatively, only taking what

she needed as opposed to gorging herself. Perhaps she would need to be more aggressive in the future. She had been feeling rather light headed as of late. She needed to toe the line between being cautious and starving herself better.

Especially if something nasty was going to be coming after her in the near future. She would need to be ready. Perhaps she should go out and find something to eat tonight. That blonde girl from earlier would do just fine.

As was her custom, Amaris spent the rest of the day indoors with the windows open, waiting for the sun to set. She stared out at the setting sun hungrily, steeling herself for what was to come. She would have to restrain herself again tonight. She could not leave any trace. She could not let herself get carried away, no matter what.

The instant the sun set she stepped out onto the street, a pure black cloak wrapped tightly around her. It was still summer, and quite warm, but Amaris needed to wear something darker while on the hunt.

She avoided streetlamps and well lit streets, preferring instead to stick to backroads and alleys. She walked as an ordinary person would, and people treated her as just another passerby. Unless, of course, they tried to catch her eye.

She could not help herself. She wanted the blonde girl. It was probably a bad idea to go after someone who had perhaps spoken about her to other people, but Amaris was willing to take the risk. The blonde had really tempted her earlier today, and Amaris was eager to give finally give into that temptation. Away from prying eyes.

Amaris had no trouble finding the place. It was a large, upper class home with a well tended garden and pond. She took a moment to admire the place from afar for a while. It really was a nice house, and she quite liked watching fish.

Eventually she made her way up to the door and raised her hand, and hit the doorbell. She stood in place, her cloak wrapped tightly

around her, as she waited for someone to answer the door.

“Ugh, who is it?” A voice from the other side grumbled. The door opened. A disheveled looking blonde girl blinked up at her before giving a start.

“Ah-“

“Hello Isabelle.” Amaris said coolly. “May I come in?”

Isabelle shot a look behind her, as if hardly daring to believe it, and then turned back around to face her again. She looked surprised, but pleased.

“You- how did you know where I lived?” She asked, as she beckoned her inside. Amaris stepped passed the threshold, staring straight at her. Isabelle flushed, turning her head away.

“You invited me over and gave me the address once.”

Isabelle’s expression faltered. “What?” She asked blankly. “No… No I don’t think so…” She looked troubled. “I would remember doing something like that…”

“Perhaps it was another girl living here.” Amaris told her. “An identical twin sister, maybe.” Isabelle laughed, in that awkward, taken aback sort of way. Amaris, calm, cool, Amaris had just told a joke.

“I think I would have noticed a twin by now.” Isabelle said. “Um, would you like to sit down…?”

She led her into a large sitting room with a large TV and game system. Isabelle, it seemed, had been in the middle of playing something when she arrived. Isabelle offered her a couch, and she accepted. Isabelle stood for a moment, as if trying to decide what to do next, before electing to sit next to her. Amaris let her. In fact, she leaned forward slightly and brushed her hand across hers as if to encourage it. Again Isabelle turned slightly red.

“Amaris…” She said, her voice high pitched. “Just what are you doing here?”

Amaris stared intently at Isabelle's face, staring deep into her eyes. She knew what she wanted to hear, and laid it out for her in the simplest way possible.

"You."

Isabelle pulled away, as if shocked. Her leg began to twitch audibly, but she could not tear her eyes away from hers.

"You're- J-j-j-joking with me, right?" She squeaked. "I mean, you-"

Amaris leaned in closer to her. "It wouldn't be a very funny joke."

Isabelle seemed to almost melt under her gaze. She leaned in closer. "I-"

Amaris' eyes flickered. She barely registered a large, blue blur swooped down on them from the neighboring room.

It happened in an instant. Isabelle was suddenly ripped backward, over the couch. Amaris leapt upward as a door slammed shut. She flew across the room and shoved the door back open.

The kitchen was a complete mess. All sorts of boxes and vegetables lay all across the place in a way that would not be out of place in a pigsty. But it was not those that caught Amaris' attention.

Standing there, in the middle of the kitchen stood a creature that she could not identify. It's legs and body were strangely humanoid, but its entire head seemed to resemble that of a Great White Shark. It's dorsal fin stuck out behind it an a threatening arc. Its large, powerful grip was wrapped around a terrified looking Isabelle.

"Speak." Amaris commanded, as she stepped into the room. Her cloak billowed behind her with a magical energy. "Who are you?"

The Shark-Man showed its teeth. Amaris knew better than to think of it as a smile. "Ah, the lovely Amaris Yew…" He rasped. "We meet at last."

"I did not ask you if you knew who I was." Amaris said coldly. "I asked you for your name."

Isabelle shot a terrified glance at her as the Shark-Man chuckled, his mouth opening wide. “I am like you, Amaris.” He said smugly. “A predator.”

He raised Isabelle’s head to his open mouth, and in one swift chomp broke off her head. Amaris stood there and watched as the creature devoured her classmate, piece by piece. He seemed to take pleasure in ripping her apart from each limb. The loud crunch of her bones filled the air with each bite.

“She was mine.” Amaris told him as the shark polished off her remains. “I hope you know what this means, Shark.”

“You may call me Bruce.” The Shark said casually, showing off his bloodstained teeth as he swallowed the last of Isabelle’s remains. “I think the Doctor has already introduced himself.”

“He did.” Amaris said. “He failed to mention you, however.”

“I am cursed.” The creature explained to her. “For millions of years my kind has ruled the seas, devouring the creatures within. Now I have been given the power to walk-“

“I didn’t ask for your life story, Bruce.” Amaris told it, as she stepped closer to it. “All I want now is to kill you in the most painful way possible.”

It lunged at her, face first. Amaris closed her eyes, and her entire body became a pure, white mist. The Shark shuddered under her as she floated upwards to the ceiling and reformed. She hung from the ceiling by her feet, suspended in mid-air. as she stared down at it. Bruce whirled around to face her, his teeth bared.

“We will meet again, Vampire.” He snarled. “Mark my words.”

He began to charge the door, and the entire thing shattered to pieces. Amaris’ keen hearing picked up several footsteps hurrying downstairs. The parents must have finally realized that something was wrong.

Amaris did not want to be caught surrounded by this mess of food and guts. She transformed again, this time into a rat, and scurried

through the door she had left open. She caught a loud gasp as she left the room.

Amaris stepped out into the street unharmed, but very hungry. She kept a keen eye out for the Shark, but saw nothing out of place. How could something so big and ugly get away like that? She headed off home without a second thought. She would have to find a new target the next day. But as she walked home, she began to think deeply about what had just happened.

Bruce had not seemed particularly interested in fighting her at all. In fact it had gone after her prey and only came after her when confronted, and then made a hasty retreat. What was the point? Was it trying to annoy her to death? It was not until she returned to her home that she realized what he had done.

He had prevented her from feeding. He was trying to starve her to death.

…

"TEENAGED GIRL DISAPPEARED. POLICE SUSPECT PREDATOR."

She clutched the newspaper in her hand tightly, her eyes fixated on the picture of that girl. Isabelle. So that was their game. They were staring to play dirty. If the United States began to suspect that a supernatural being that preyed on humans was running amok, they would certainly send someone after it. And if that was the case, it would not be long until she was found out. Vampires such as herself were on the top of their lists. A freakish amphibian shark that had been cursed by a Voodoo Witch Doctor to hunt humans would not be considered a likely culprit.

Amaris spent the entire day glancing at the paper, trying to figure out what her best move should be. Should she run away? Or should she tackle the Voodoo Shark head on? She could not decide. Looking at the paper made her feel like she had a better handle on the situation than she really did.

"Oh…"

Amaris looked up, surprised, to find Mike standing over her. The stalker was leaning over the table, but he wasn't looking at her. He was looking at the paper laid out in front of her.

"So you've heard, huh?" He asked. Amaris twisted her lip.

"Naturally." She said. It would have been more accurate to say that she had seen the last moments of Isabella's life first hand, but she thought it would best not to talk about that.

"You and Isabelle were friends, weren't you?"

Yes they were friends. They wanted to use each other for their own purposes. Isabella wanted sex, Amaris wanted food. It was a classic love story, one that had been told all around the world.

"Not really." Amaris admitted. Mike gave her a look.

"What?" Amaris asked him, coming off as more aggressive than she intended.

"Amaris…" Mike tried to find the words. "Is this… upsetting you?"

It had upset her last night when the take out she had ordered had been stolen by someone else. Today she was over it.

"Yes, I'm very upset." Amaris lied. "I… really liked her." She paused, the wheels in her head turning. "We were thinking about dating."

Mike stared at her. She was annoyed to find that he seemed to like that idea. She had hoped that would make him back off a bit. Would he ever leave her alone?

"Amaris, what is going on with you?" Mike asked. "Tell me."

She could have told him. She could have told him how she was born a Vampire several hundred years ago. She could tell him how she spent six hundred years traveling the planet, until Lord Dracula was killed in 1890 which led to a long, bitter struggle over who would take over as Lord of his region, one that Amaris had fought tooth and nail to take for herself. She could talk about how the position was seized by three individuals who had no business having it, and how they and their minions still hounded her to this day. She could

talk about herself at length in this way. There was an awful lot to talk about.

Instead she chose to treat him as she always did.

“Fuck you, Mike.” She told him, before turning away in a huff.

And that was that.

Chapter 2

“Have you seen Amaris lately?”

Taylor lowered her newspaper to give Mike a look. “Dude, let her go. She’s trouble.” The two were sitting around a small, round table at the library. Mike eyed Taylor with clear annoyance.

“She isn’t that bad.”

“You really are a masochist.” Taylor sniffed, as she flipped the page. “She probably OD’ed in some motel somewhere, and her pimp is beating the guy who gave her the drugs with a hammer-“

“She’s not a prostitute.” Mike insisted. “But there is something weird going on.” He had explained, to all of his friends, what he had seen the other day. No one was particularly surprised that Amaris was involved with something shady, but no one seemed to care as much as Mike did. Most seemed content to leave Amaris to her fate, whatever that may be. Whether to drugs or demons, losing Amaris would not be a big deal to most around her. Mike felt differently, however. The past two weeks had seen another long Amaris absence, and Mike was beginning to be seriously worried. He had not seen her at all since that day, and he had thought about her every day since.

“If you’re so worried about her, why don’t you drop by her house?”

“Her house?” Mike repeated. “Uh, I don’t think so… that would be kind of weird.” He was reluctant to have another repeat of what happened last time.

Despite his protests, Mike took the suggestion to heart and immediately once school ended he found himself staring up at Amaris’ home. He had known where she lived for a long time. He

had toyed with the idea of coming by in the past, but always (Usually) shied away from the thought of actually doing it. Despite what Amaris may have said, he was not a stalker.

He knocked on the front door of the house and waited. He heard no footsteps. He tried the bell instead, and waited several minutes. He rang the bell again, and after no response he was forced to admit that no one was home.

He stared at the door, unwilling to leave just yet. After a little bit of hesitation, he reached forward and gripped the doorknob. It slid open easily. It was not locked or bolted. Mike slowly tiptoed into the house.

"Hello?"

It was dead silent. Although the hall seemed brightly lit and well cared for, it had a stiff, lifeless quality to it that Mike found almost unnerving. Not a thing looked out of place.

"Hello?"

He stepped further into the hall, his eyes taking in all of the decorations around the room. It was so strange. Although the home itself looked bright and inviting, everything seemed to be covered in a thin layer of dust and cobwebs. It was almost as if no one lived here at all.

He stepped into a small sitting room, and his eyes fell on a thick bookcase filled to the brim with exotic texts. He recognized a few of them as ones that Amaris had taken with her to school, but most were completely unknown to him. They, compared to the rest of the house, looked impeccably clean and well cared for.

"So the stalker has broken into my home."

He jumped. Whirling around, he came to face Amaris, and his jaw dropped. She was not wearing any of the things she usually wore to school. The dark jackets, the gloves, the sunglasses. In fact she was not wearing much at all. Her pure black bikini contrasted heavily with her milky white skin.

“I was just getting some sun.” Amaris told him, as she stepped past him into the sitting room. His eyes followed her as she stepped into the room and replaced a book on the shelf. “I think I look much better with a tan… Don’t you?”

She did a little twirl, as if admiring herself. Mike stared at her, and then decided to address the elephant in the room.

“But you’re so pale.”

Amaris frowned at him, tilting her head to the side. “You noticed.”

“It’s kind of a hard thing to miss.” In fact Amaris’ paleness was often one of the things the girls liked to gossip most about her. Sometimes it felt as if she had not stepped out into the sun in weeks. Supposedly this was supposed to be unattractive, but Mike didn’t see why. In fact it made her only more alluring.

“Hm.” Amaris said, as she turned away from him again. “Well, since you seem to be so curious… I was born with a certain condition that makes it very hard for me to tan.” She waved her hand at him, whirling her finger around in midair. “It is kind of a pain.”

“Really?” Mike asked, as he took a step forward. “That’s horrible. What do you have?”

She did not answer. She simply stood, facing out the window.

“You know, stalker…” She said, her voice oddly quiet. “I’ve been thinking about you a lot lately.”

Mike stiffened. “You have?” He sounded a little too eager. Amaris turned around and gave him a small nod.

“Yes.” She told him, her voice low and sultry. “I went on a date a while back… with another woman-“ (Mike stiffened) “And throughout the entire thing I could not stop thinking about you.”

Mike was at a complete loss for words at her statement. It was beyond even his wildest fantasies.

Amaris stepped closer to him, her eyes fixated on his with an intense, almost hypnotizing aura. “I… need to confess something to

you, stalker.” She said. Mike stiffened as her hand brushed against his face. “I… want you inside of me.”

Inwardly Mike was screaming.

DON’T FUCK THIS UP DON’T FUCK THIS UP DON’T FUCK THIS UP.

He said and did nothing as Amaris smiled, and stroked his head.

“Good boy.” She said softly, as she lowered her mouth to his neck…

And then promptly pushed him out of the way as SOMETHING came bursting through the wall at them.

Mike hit the floor with a thud as Amaris stood above him, her hands outstretched on either side of her protectively.

“I knew you would come.” She hissed. Her voice was especially cool and sinister. “You have been targeting my prey. Like a jackal.”

Mike sat up, completely dazed. He must have hit his head harder than he thought. Standing there above them, among the debris, was a monster. It seemed to resemble a giant, man-eating shark, but it’s body physique resembled that of a person.

Amaris spread her arms wider as she stared down the creature. “If you believe I will allow you to take him as well, you are sadly mistaken.”

Mike slowly backed away from them. The monster was horrifying enough, but something about the way that Amaris was speaking horrified him to his core. He had to get away. He had to.

The creature widened its smile as it stepped forward. “Do you really think you can stop me?” It rasped.

“I know I can.” Amaris replied coyly.

Mike screamed as the thing dove at him. Its shark like mouth opened wide. Amaris growled as she kicked out at it with her heel. The shark shrieked in pain as the surprisingly sharp heel penetrated its skin. Blood erupted forth, bursting forward up onto Amaris’ face. She clutched her mouth tightly as the shark backed away.

Mike let out a panicked breath. What had he just wandered into? The girl he liked had just stabbed a shark man with her stiletto. This was a dream. It had to be!

The shark pulled back, snarling at an impassive looking Amaris.

"You will not feed, Amaris." The thing rasped. "Every time you try… I will be there to put a stop to it."

Amaris stood impassively as the thing, just as suddenly as it had come, turned and rushed out of the hole in the wall whence it came. It disappeared into dark particles immediately once sunlight touched its flesh.

"What… what the fuck was that?" Mike asked, as he shakily got to his feet. Amaris did not even cast him a glance. She stepped to the hole in her hole, observing it intently.

"Hm." She said. "It burst through a wall last time too… Can it not appear inside buildings…?"

Mike took an angry step forward. "Answer me!" He shouted at her.

Amaris ignored him. She stood in her tight, revealing bikini and stilettos, staring at the wall.

"It will be back for you, I think."

Mike pulled back from her. "H-huh…?"

"I will make a deal with you, stalker." Amaris said coolly, as she turned to face him. "As you now know, I am in the middle of a battle with a monster. It seems to want to use you to get to me. I need your help in luring it out so I can kill it." Mike stared blankly. She tilted her head. "Do you need me to repeat myself?"

"I have so many questions, I don't even know where to begin…" Mike muttered, clutching his head. "Okay, this thing… why is it after you?"

She answered promptly. "Because it wants to kill me."

"Why does it want to kill you?" Mike asked exasperatedly.

"Because it has been ordered to."

“Ordered by who?”

“The Witch Doctor who cursed it to behave that way.”

Mike palmed his forehead, groaning. “Okay, let’s take a step back.” He said. “Or… perhaps several steps back.” He stared at her, trying to read her expression. “Just who are you, Amaris?”

“Making this about me, are you stalker?” Amaris replied, sounding amused. “You do not need to know anything about me. You simply need to help me eliminate this thing. I promise… you will be aptly rewarded.”

She gave her lips a small lick. Mike’s eyes fell on them, wondering what they would taste like…

“Your role is to help me defeat this jackal.” Amaris said. “The sooner, the better.”

“W-wait…” Mike stammered. “Shouldn’t we get the authorities involved in this?”

Although standard police forces were not equipped to deal with monsters, they were more than able to get in contact with those who were. Even this idiot knew that much.

“I cannot do that, stalker.” Amaris told him. “Doing so would be suicide for me.” She closed her eyes, taking in a deep breath, and then opened them again. Mike gave a startled cry and leapt backwards at her blood red stare.

“I cannot call for someone who can hunt monsters..” Amaris said shortly, as her eyes faded to her usual, attractive black. “For you see I am one.”

Mike could not tear his eyes away from hers. “Amaris...” He said slowly. “Just what exactly are you?”

Instead of answering, her gaze had hardened. “That is no concern of yours, stalker.” She said, her voice cool. “All you need to do is help me defeat this monster.”

She paused, as if considering something.

“If you help me, I will give you a kiss.”

She smiled at him, tilting her head invitingly. “But not today.” She said. “Come back tomorrow, stalker. And then we’ll talk more about what you must do.”

She leaned forward, her arms outstretched as if wanting to give him a hug. Mike pulled back, closing his eyes. He stood there for a silent minute, half expecting her to touch him, but it never came. When he opened his eyes, he was back on the street.

“What…?”

He turned around, trying to get his bearings. It took him a while to realize where exactly he was. He was several blocks away from his house, and nowhere near where he had been before.

What in the world had he just fallen into…?

Once again Amaris did not show up to school the next day. His friends had grown bored with discussing the possibilities of why she kept vanishing, but Mike could not bring himself to explain what had happened. He thought of little else all day. Amaris was involved in some dark shit. They had all suspected as such, but he was beginning to dread learning just how deep this rabbit hole went.

But he also found himself thinking a lot about Amaris, and what she must be going through. Having a creature like that out to get you… it must be horrifying. Amaris must have been scared out of her wits.

He clenched his leg with his fist. Amaris was relying on him to help her. He had to help her. He had to. He had to. He had to. He had to help Amaris. He had to.

He was anxious to see her again, to see what she wanted from him. And once class was over he was back in front of her house, staring up at it. He could see her standing by the window on the second floor, staring down at him. The front door opened, all on its own, and Mike stepped in.

“Ahhh…”

Amaris was standing at the top of the stairs. She practically glided down towards him, and Mike flinched as she wrapped her arms around him.

"It is wonderful to see you, stalker." Amaris told him. She pulled away slightly and lightly touched his face. "Please… follow me."

Mike did as he was told. He followed her, as if in a daze, to her kitchen. It was a spotless, shining room. Amaris waved her hand at a nearby chair, and Mike sat down, staring straight ahead. He had to help her. He had to. He had to help her. He had to. What was he to do? What was he to do? What did she need him to do? What did she need him to do?

"Our enemy." Amaris said, as she stepped around him, trailing her hand along his neckline He shivered at her touch. "Is a shark. Do you know anything about sharks?"

He said nothing as she drew little circles on his neck with her hand. Her hand was soft and cool. Her touch made him shiver.

"Sharks are predatory fish that have lived on this planet longer than most other life forms." Amaris told him. "I am told that modern scientists believe them to have first appeared in the Triassic era… four hundred and twenty million years ago." She stroked the back of his neck, causing a tingly feeling to run down his neck. "They survived all five mass extinctions, including the one that wiped out the dinosaurs. They are, some would say, perfect predators."

Mike stood completely still, soaking in all of her words. He could fell Amaris' breath on the back of his neck, she was so close…

"Sharks, despite popular belief, do not eat people." Amaris said. Her voice was calm and relaxed, and put him at ease. "This one, however, is different. It quite enjoys tearing apart people, limb from limb and devouring their pieces whole."

Her voice was like velvet. He could fall himself falling in love with her voice. He could sit like this forever.

"My task for you." Amaris said, her voice quiet. "Is to help me take advantage of this thing's behavior." She reached down, behind him,

and gently placed a bottle onto the table. She did not elaborate on what it was. He had to ask.

"What is it?"

"This?" Amaris asked, as she popped the cork and raised the bottle over his head. Mike flinched as some kind of liquid slid onto his back. Amaris set the bottle aside and then began rubbing it into his skin. "Hot sauce."

"Hot…?"

"Very, very potent hot sauce." Amaris said. "Enough of this would kill a person. I would say a lot more would kill a shark, don't you?"

Mike bent his head and allowed her to do this. Something was very wrong. He should have been panicking, but something about the way she was treating him made him unable to even move. He didn't want to move.

Amaris, he noticed faintly, rubbed the hot sauce all over his body. Other than a small, round spot on the side of his neck. After several minutes of lathering him up Amaris stood, and washed her hands in the kitchen sink. Mike sat there, staring straight ahead.

"What… is going on?" He rasped. Amaris looked back at him, considering his words.

"You're hot." She said simply, before turning away. Mike bent his head, a warm feeling rushing through his chest.

It was not long until Amaris rejoined him at the table. "Very well." She said slowly. "Bend your head over the table, please."

Mike did as he was told.

Amaris smiled to herself as she straddled him from behind. She sensually pressed her hands against his head and bent over him. Mike froze in anticipation as her lips lowered to his neck. He barely registered the sound of the walls shattering to pieces once again, and the shark staring down at them hungrily.

Amaris pressed herself protectively against him. "No, don't-"

The shark punched her hard across the face and she went sprawling across the room. She slammed into the counter and slid across it, falling down on the other side. Without a word the Shark grabbed hold of him. Mike barely even struggled as the shark opened its mouth wide, its eyes pressing back into his head, as it brought Mike closer to its rows of sharp teeth…

Only to stop mid motion.

"That smell…" He muttered, as he lowered the boy. "Does not smell appetizing." He brought his hand back up, and Mike went cartwheeling through the air, landing straight on top of the counter that Amaris had slid over. He gasped in pain at the blow.

Suddenly he began to feel panicked by the situation. What the fuck had he been doing? He had allowed himself to be put into this insane situation… AMARIS HAD TRIED FEEDING HIM TO A SHARK.

Panicked, he rolled over the counter and fell to the ground. He let out a scream as he fell on top of a hiding Amaris.

"Off!!"

Mike let out a cry as Amaris shoved him away, with surprising strength, slamming his head into the counter. Another throbbing pain slammed his skull. His entire body was screaming in pain as Amaris darted out from behind the counter.

The shark pounced on her, widening its jaws threateningly. Amaris narrowed her eyes, her entire body shifted into Mist.

The shark laughed as the cloud of Mist surrounded him completely, covering his vision. "Mist again?" He snorted, as Amaris reformed again, staring down at him from above. "Have you truly become this weak, Vampire? You could not even muster the energy to poison me with your own power?" Amaris said nothing, as she folded her cloak around her and stared down at him from above. Mike was groaning in pain by the countertop. The Shark was right. She had not been eating well, and it was beginning to affect her powers. She was going to have to end this quickly.

Her eyes fell on the knives sitting by on a counter, not far from where Mike had been sitting. Or perhaps she could improvise her original strategy.

"Mike, my love!" She called, her hypnotizing gaze on him. "You must take a knife and cut-"

The shark bent its legs and leapt upward at her. Amaris quickly found herself turning back into Mist to escape his grasp. But in this form she was not able to speak, let alone utilize hypnotism. She would have to reform and try again…

The shark had landed and was eyeing her again as she reformed, this time on the ground, and stared up at her enemy. It seemed to grin at her as it leered at her.

"I have never had the pleasure of devouring a vampire." It told her, as it took a small step forward. "I wonder how you taste."

"You will never find out." Amaris told it, as her eyes flashed towards Mike.

She was unfortunate. Although their eyes met, the pain was simply too much for him to focus on her eyes. If he was healthy, she could have him do whatever she liked. But as he was now…

The Jaws darted towards her again, and once again she dodged, sidestepping the blow. She was feeling a little light headed. The lack of food was starting to get to her. She had been hungry for days now… Her enemy had made a smart move by attacking every time she tried to feed. She was not fighting at even a fraction of her strength.

The shark struck out at her with a mighty hand. Amaris gasped as the thing slammed into her face, sending her sprawling. She stared upward as the thing's foot slammed down onto her stomach with a force that would have killed a living woman. Amaris stared up at it coldly, without even the smallest sign of pain or discomfort.

"How much pressure can your body take, I wonder…?" The shark asked her, as it leaned forward, its jaws widening over her head.

Amaris did not struggle. She stared at the maw of the beast calmly, taking in its many fangs.

"Amaris!"

A small figure slammed itself into the shark. The thing tilted its head to get a better look at its attacker. Mike grimaced, as he pulled away, bloody knife in hand. He had stabbed the shark in the back.

It stared at him, as if unable to believe what he had just tried to do. Mike flinched away from his gaze, turning his gaze down towards Amaris instead. Amaris found  her chance.

She met his eyes.

Mike took another several steps back as he raised the knife in a downward position, above his head. He brought it down and impaled his own thigh, sending blood spurting everywhere. The Shark stared at it for a while, as if unable to believe it.

"BLOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD."

It stepped off of Amaris and raced towards Mike, its jaws wide. Amaris immediately floated to her feet, her black cloak billowing behind her, as the shark's jaws came down on Mike.

"He's mine!" Amaris snarled, as she leapt onto the sharks back. She wrapped her thighs around the upper part of its thick head and quickly scratched at the shark's eyes with her fingers. It roared in pain, falling to the floor mid charge as Mike scrambled away, completely untouched.

Both of them were taken completely by bloodlust. Neither of them spoke as they struggled and thrashed against each other. Amaris used her powers to stay attached to the beasts head, away from its jaws as it rampaged about, trying to throw her off. They slammed into kitchen tables, the refrigerator, and the oven before making their way to the whole in the wall… the one that led straight outside!

Amaris smiled to herself as the shark stepped over the side of the building, and completely unprepared for the fall, completely tilted

over. Amaris quickly leapt off of her enemy as it crashed into the ground head first. A loud CRACK filled the air.

It was not a large fall. Perhaps a story or even less. But falling from any height head first would snap a person in two. The Shark, having been cursed with humanoid features, certainly seemed to be no different.

The shark lay completely still below her feet. She stared at it, ensuring that it truly was dead, before she floated backwards back into her house. She ignored the mess in the kitchen and stepped through it. She followed the scent of blood into the sitting room.

Mike was lying on the couch, his blood staining the cushions. He had knocked aside some tables and chairs to reach it. Blood spatter was everywhere. But Amaris hardly noticed. She stared hungrily at Mike's gasping, pained form. Her eyes stared past the hot sauce she had massaged into his skin to focus on the stream of blood running down his leg.

He froze as she stepped inside the room, licking her lips. "I want you."

Mike cried out as Amaris pinned him against the couch. She bent her head over him, her bloodlust completely overtaking her senses. Now was the time. Now was the time to FEED.

She bit down onto his neck with unusual ferocity. Mike cried out in pain, rather than pleasure, and tried to shake her off. Amaris tried her best to hold him down. She had not lined up her bite exactly correctly… she could taste the intense heat of the sauce on her upper lip. All she cared about was getting that sweet, delicious blood into her.

"Ooooh!"

She could not help but moan with ecstasy as she bit down even harder. Mike shrieked in pain. This… this was amazing…! No… this was WONDERFUL!

Not wonderful… the best she ever had!

She pulled away from him slightly as she swallowed, staring down at him with wide eyes. He twitched a little, before opening his eyes at her. Their eyes met.

"What- what happened?" Mike asked weakly. He was looking rather pale. Amaris had almost over done it. If she had pushed him anymore, he would have been killed.

Amaris smiled warmly and pressed her face against his chest, sighing contentedly. She did not answer him. Mike shifted about uncomfortably beneath her. "Amaris…"

He began to push against her. Amaris opened her eyes sleepily and stared down at him.

"What is it, beloved?" She asked quietly. "Is something wrong…?"

"I-"

She met his eyes and he fell limp against the couch. She sighed irritably, shaking her head at him. She felt a little woozy. She disliked using her powers immediately after feeding. She much preferred resting on top of her victim.

She pressed her hand against Mike's chest and sighed. She began to trail little circles on his chest with her finger. She wanted to tear into him again, but his body could not handle it. He was the most delicious person she had ever feasted on, and she could not wait to feast on him again.

But with her situation… was that even possible? Her enemies would send more and more powerful enemies after her, and keeping this stalker around could turn out badly for her.

But she liked his blood too much to care.

…

"You have failed."

The Witch Doctor stood in the center of the three thrones, his head bent. "My first creature failed." He said. "But if I were to be given another chance, another creature-"

“No.”

The voice came from directly behind him. He flinched at the noise.

“No?” He repeated. “But I-“

“You have had your chance to kill Amaris Yew.” The voice continued, as if he had not spoken. “And you failed.”

“I have come far closer than any of the others-“

“But you did not kill her.” Another voice continued. “Your tactics will not work a second time. The traitor has already taken steps to prevent you from doing that again.”

“We could send you back out there… But Amaris will be ready this time, and send your head back to us on a platter.” A third voice, this one light and flirtatious said, giggling a little. “We would not even have to punish you ourselves.”

“You have failed. There is nothing more to discuss.”

The Witch Doctor bowed his head submissively, accepting his dismissal.

…

Mike shuddered. He felt exhausted, and worn out. His eyes fluttered opened. His arms felt extremely heavy and stiff. But he was warm and comfortable. The most warm and comfortable he had been in a long time, in fact.

“Ah, you’re awake….”

Mike almost jumped. Standing there, across his room and carrying a feather duster, stood Amaris. She smiled at him as she stepped up to him, rustling the duster under his chin.

“You sure have seen better days, beloved.” She noted, as she sat down on the bedside. Mike stared at her, openmouthed.

“A-Amaris…”

“Yes.” She said. “That’s my name.” Mike swallowed. She seemed more upbeat and pleasant than he had ever seen her. “Are you feeling alright?”

"Y-yeah…" He said. "But… what are you doing in my room?" It took him a while to realize that this was most certainly not his own room. It was much more bare and looked barely lived in.

"Hmm."

Amaris' lip curled. Behind her the curtain, which had been shining bright light into the room, suddenly slid shut, casting the room into darkness.

"As you now know." She said. "I am a Vampire." Until that moment Mike had completely forgotten about what had been happening for the past several days. But hearing Amaris spell it out for him, just like that, brought it all out.

So many questions were bursting forward in his skull, but Amaris did not seem to want to give him the time to voice them.

"I'm sure you and your friends have suspected as much about me in the past." Amaris said, as she tapped her nails against his leg. "A monkey could have figured it out."

Mike did not want to admit to her that no one he had ever spoken to had seriously speculated that she was a vampire. The worst the rumors had gotten was assume she was into drugs and worked as a prostitute.

"Humans have a tendency to not be aware of the world around them." Amaris said. "So please forgive me if I feel the need to explain my situation to you."

She stood and stepped around, to the foot of the bed. Mike watched her apprehensively as she came to a stop directly in front of him. She raised the Feather duster in front of face, covering it completely.

"in modern times my kind has been nearly driven to extinction." Amaris began. "It is commonly thought that it is because of scientific advances improving vampire hunting methods, but that is not actually the case. In reality a political situation in the late nineteenth century involving the death of our leader sent our kind into turmoil. A bloody civil war erupted among our kind, one that lasted far longer

than either of your World Wars. When it ended, three individuals had almost complete control over Europe."

She paused.

"They were the Brides of Dracula." She said. "And their first order of business upon gaining power was to eliminate all opposing Vampire covens…" Her eyes flashed. "Including my own."

"Why would they do that?" Mike asked, completely enraptured.

"Because of how the Vampire hierarchy works." Amaris explained. "As we age, we become more and more powerful, and therefore more of a threat. Vampire covens have traditionally always been at war with each other. Albeit never to the point today where one coven rules absolutely." Her gaze hardened. "Due to the very specific powers of the Triad, male vampires have gone virtually extinct." Mike stared at her, openmouthed.

"I've never heard that-"

"As I said, there is a lot that humans are not aware of when it comes to our affairs." Amaris told him. "Or our history."

She stepped forward, and crawled onto the bed on hands and knees. Her back arched upward. Mike gasped as she leaned in close to his face, her gorgeous black eyes shining with an unusual light.

"Or about me." Amaris said quietly. They stared at each other for several seconds. Mike could feel his heart racing.

"That is my story." Amaris said. "Very much abridged, I assure you, but it cannot be helped." Mike gave a start as she pushed herself off the bed and floated above him, to the ceiling. He gaped up at her as she stared down at him from above.

"I'm sure you're wondering why I brought you back here." Amaris said. "And why I have not drained every last ounce of blood from that body of yours. And why exactly I am telling you this." Mike stared up at her, trying to convince himself that this was really happening. That it wasn't all a dream.

“The truth is…” Amaris hesitated. “After you saved me from that shark, I… began to like you.” She floated downward towards him, and Mike felt her weight press down on top of him, gently. “I… would really like to be your girlfriend, Mike.” She said, slowly, apprehensively. “If… you would have me…?” Mike found himself reaching forward, and his fingers wrapped around hers. Amaris Yew smiled brilliantly at him, before lowering her head down to his neck.

Chapter 3

Everyone at school was abuzz with one simply line of conversation. The unexpected new couple of Amaris and Mike.

“Mike?” May, asked the instant they were alone together “How did it happen?”

“Why did you do it?” Taylor asked crossly, when they were along working together in class later that day.

“Have you done it yet?” A random, goth kid that Mike had never spoken to his life asked. Mike didn’t respond. He simply looked away…

Only for his hand to be taken by Amaris. “Every day.” She said, leaning into his shoulder. “Each time more wonderful than the last.”

The two walked away, hand in hand as the boy gaped at them. Mike already was beginning to feel that he wouldn’t have to tell lies to his friends about how much and how often he was sleeping with Amaris… she went ahead and did it for him, with no sense of shame or embarrassment.

“Why are you doing that?” Mike asked her, after she had just gotten done telling a disgusted looking May that Mike had completely worn her out the night before.

“I’ve seen your American movies.” Amaris sniffed. “I won’t have anyone bullying MY boyfriend for not having enough sex with his girlfriend.” She spoke as if that settled the matter.

“But we haven’t actually had sex.”

“They don’t need to know that!” She hissed.

Amaris, he was beginning to realize, was not the cold, distant person she loved to present herself as. In fact, she came off as being downright eccentric. Although she spoke elegantly, and acted hostile to everyone, her stated reasoning for doing certain things seemed downright strange to him.

Most obviously, their façade of a relationship.

"I'll be your girlfriend in exchange for your blood." Amaris had told him. "Agreed?"

She had, apparently, loved the way he tasted and wanted to keep him around. But due to her enemies, and her unwillingness to attract the attention United States government, she had decided that the best way to entice him to stick around without frightening him away was to be as up front about her situation as possible, and to go out with him.

Well, it was certainly working. Mike thought. His head was feeling far clearer than it had while she had had him do her bidding under hypnosis, and he would be lying if Amaris did not constantly manage to impress him.

One day he woke up in her apartment to find her poring over the school things that he had left there the night before. His History essay, his current events project, and his Math homework lay nearly in a pile, completely finished. She had even gone ahead and made him some flashcards for his French vocabulary.

"It was no trouble." She told him, ignoring his amazement. "I do not need to sleep, and I did not have anything better to do…"

She often went out of her way to do little things like that. Nothing he owned had a single stain on it. She was more than willing to go out of her way to get him things that he needed. One day he was just beginning to think he had wished he hadn't skipped breakfast, only for her to pull a pre-made lunch out of her bag and hand it to him. For an immortal bloodsucking vampire she surprisingly knew exactly what he liked to eat, and Mike slowly began to realize that the food she kept in her kitchen was only for him.

The only catch to all of this, was of course, their bi weekly routine.

"I've been waiting all week for this." Amaris purred, as she trailed her arms against his shoulders. Mike shuddered at her touch as she lowered her mouth to his neck.

According to Amaris, she had specifically been trying to cut down on her blood consumption in order to prevent people from suspecting a Vampire was living in the area. But because of their relationship, and Mike choosing to cooperate with her, Amaris was able to feed on him twice a week, which allowed her to regain her strength while giving him plenty of time to recover in between sessions. His blood, from what he gathered, was incredibly potent and gave her strength.

"You're wonderful, Mike…" She purred. "You taste lovely… I can't wait to have you again."

Mike raised his fingers and touched the markings on his neck, a little self consciously. They were starting to become very pronounced. He wondered how long it would be until someone noticed. Amaris was quick to notice his feelings. She was quite good at that.

"Perhaps I can go a little lower?" She suggested, as she trailed her hand down his neck. "Whatever is best for you, beloved."

She no longer called him a stalker. She had little nicknames for everyone. It was another one of her odd personality quirks.

"Amaris…." He said, his voice low. "How powerful are the Brides of Dracula?"

She paused. "Is that what you have been concerned about?" She asked. "They will not touch you. I will not let them take you from me."

"I'm worried about you."

Amaris paused. Mike felt as if he had taken her by surprise. "You do not have to worry." She repeated. "But if you so wish it… I will tell you everything I know about them."

"They say the unknown is the scariest thing about our existence."

Amaris leaned forward and kissed his neck. A bright red imprint of her lips was left behind on his skin. “You really ARE a catch.” She commended him. “Very well. Please ask me anything you like.”

“Just… who are the Brides of Dracula?” Mike asked. The question had been on his mind since she had brought them up.

Amaris’ hair fell across his face. He sputtered a bit. Apparently she had nodded a bit too enthusiastically. “Ah.” She said. “You want a more thorough history of my enemy. I understand.” She paused, as if trying to decide where to begin. “It began, I suppose, in 1897.” She said. “With the publication of the non-fictional account of the slaying of Lord Dracula.”

Mike shifted a little bit under her.

“Ah, I’m sure you are not aware.” Amaris said, as if she had read his mind. “Dracula was mistakenly published as a novel. It was mistaken as fiction by the literary agent who handled the manuscript. To his eye the all too true accounts of how Dracula sought to expand his territory to England was clearly a work of fiction. The agent believed the materials compiled to try and piece together who Dracula was and how he behaved was simply a stylistic choice of the author, and not a genuine attempt at documenting an event that actually happened.”

She paused.

“It is worth noting that, because it was published as a work it fiction, it gained far more interest and became far more widespread than it would have otherwise.” She said. “Which played a major part in how some humans have become extremely successful at hunting vampires in modern times. I have always found that very amusing.”

She paused again, probably to think about where she had left off, and then began to speak again.

“The Slaying of Dracula sent the monsters in our region into turmoil.” She said. “For hundreds of years, seven powerful demon lords ruled over the Earth. With the felling of one of them, Lord Dracula, our way of life was under threat. Vampire Covens, such as

my own, sought to seize control from the estate he left behind and restore order to Europe."

She sighed. "But, unfortunately, we failed." She said. "Three of his followers, although nowhere near as fierce or powerful, successfully managed to divvy up the region among them. Their powers, although not spectacular, were collectively enough to vanquish most of their enemies… or, in the case of the other lords, keep them at bay, as Lord Dracula had done."

She fell silent again. It was about a minute before she spoke.

"Their reign has brought on many changes." She said. "Most importantly, at least when it comes to my conflict with them, is their lasting grudge against anyone who dared fight on opposing sides during the bid for power."

She bent her head. "Such as myself…"

"Who did you fight for?"

"I?" Amaris repeated, as she gently combed through his hair with her fingers. "I sought to take the throne for myself. I was no friend of Dracula's, but I deeply respected his prowess in combat and genuine desire to preserve our way of life."

She stopped brushing his hair.

"I failed." She murmured. "And the Brides of Dracula are not the kind of people to forget."

She was old, he realized then and there. Far, far older than he, or his parents. When did she become a Vampire? How long had she been fighting the Brides of Dracula? He wanted to ask her so much. But today, he felt as if he had already overstepped his bounds, and decided to leave it for another day.

…

"Perhaps we should have given the Witch Doctor another chance."

"No, no. He failed. I do not tolerate failure."

“We cannot expect everyone to succeed on their first attempt… Perhaps he would have prevailed, had we given him more leeway.”

“You doubt your own decisions too much, Sister.”

The Brides of Dracula sat in thrones that towered over a small dais in the center of the room. Each throne was placed in a way that each occupant could always see the others. The dark room cast shadows across all of their faces, rendering them all completely indiscernible.

“She has taken a lover.” One of the Sisters spoke. “His blood has an unusual quality to it. She is recovering far more quickly.” One of the other Brides giggled.

“How young is he…?”

“She is changing up her tactics.” The Sister continued, ignoring her. “She has remained in her home. She seems to be preparing to fight us outright once more.”

One of the other Sisters chuckled.

“It is about time.” She purred. “It has been too long since Amaris Yew has decided to challenge us directly. I am looking forward to what she tries to pull this time…”

Although a powerful and ancient Vampire, Amaris had lost her entire extended coven and assets during the Vampire Civil War, which cost her all of her military influence. Her ancestral home in Spain had sat abandoned for almost a hundred years as she traveled the world, trying her hardest to regain her political clout. Although she left thousands of bodies in her wake, she had come no closer to her goal. No one was interested in starting another war, at least against them. Amaris had been completely alone and somewhat powerless for quite a long time now.

She was still very much a threat, but somewhat lesser so than she should have been, considering her powers and former station.

“We cannot continue sending warriors after Amaris’ head.” One of the Sisters continued saying. “If she is simply going to slaughter

them, as she has been doing, it is going to be nothing but a waste."

"An interesting dilemma." Another Sister spoke. "Amaris is far too powerful to justify sending a common grunt after her… but neither can we send a dedicated military force to execute her. Doing so unprovoked will spark a counterattack from the United States."

"The Little Devils are newly formed and inexperienced." One of the Sisters noted. "But after the incident in Chidori-"

"That's it!"

The other two sisters stopped speaking as the third sister, rather energetically, pounded her fist on the side of the table.

"We do not need to do anything!" She said, as she looked between her sisters, a look of triumph on her face. "We simply need to take advantage of the recent changes in society. We can have the United States go after Little Amaris Yew for us."

"And how exactly do you propose we do that?"

The woman sat back down, smiling widely. She crossed her legs and pressed her fist against her cheek in a thoughtful position.

"We let them know that there is a powerful Vampire preying on a little boy." She said. "They will take care of the rest."

"It will take some time for them to organize a force that they think is suitable to deal with the problem." It was noted. "We must keep Amaris on her toes."

"I do not want to send another creature after her. There is no need to spill blood."

"Perhaps we could take a page out of our Witch Doctor's book and simply make our own?"

…

"Mike!"

Mike turned around in the hallway as his friend Taylor raced up to him. She was breathing hard… She must have been looking for him everywhere.

“Hey, what’s up?” Mike asked, conversationally. “I was just on my way to Amaris’ place…”

Taylor straightened up and stretched. “Yeah, we need to talk about that.” She said. She sounded unusually serious. Mike narrowed his eyes. He shifted his bag on his shoulder as he turned around to face her properly.

“About Amaris?”

“Yeah.” Taylor said. “Look… Mike…” She paused, as if a little unsure of what to say. “Mike… everyone has been talking, and we really think we need to step in.”

“Step in?” Mike repeated, bemused, as Taylor gave a nod.

“Yeah…” She said. She rubbed her neck, a little reluctantly. “Everyone… well, no one is exactly… well, sure that this is the best decision you could have made.”

“Why?”

“Amaris….” Taylor shook her head, trying to find the right words. “Something is wrong with her.” She said, finally. “ I know you like her, I know that, but… something is wrong with her.”

Mike nodded. He knew that was how they felt. It was how he felt too. But now…

“There is something wrong.” He acknowledged. “But it doesn’t matter to me.”

Taylor stared at him, his mouth agape as Mike smiled.

“I love her anyway.”

He turned around and waved his hand at Taylor absentmindedly, and walked away. Taylor wasn’t wrong. He and the others had their hearts in the right place. But none of them could understand just what was happening between he and Amaris.

“Hey, Amaris…”

She looked up at him from her textbook. “Yes?”

“I was wondering…” He hesitated, wondering how to broach the subject with her. “Whether or not you have heard the gossip at school?”

She ruffled the page of her book. “I hear all of the gossip.” She sniffed. “I know who is sleeping with who, who wants to sleep with who, and who speculate about who is sleeping with who. I am the American Teenage girl that other American teenage girls wish they could be.” She gave him a look. “Why do you ask?”

“People are talking about us.”

“They do not know the truth.” Amaris told him, as she looked back down at her book. “Taylor approached you, then?”

He gave a surprised start. “You knew-?”

“I knew she was going to.” Amaris said, as she flipped the page. “She’s jealous, although she doesn’t want to admit it.”

Mike made a face. “What?”

“And that May girl…” Amaris went on, as if he had not spoken. “She certainly is one to criticize your choice in a relationship, considering her situation.” Mike became concerned.

“What situation?”

“Oh, nothing too bad, I assure you.” Amaris said. “But please don’t let her bully you about how dangerous it is to be around me…”

She was often rather evasive when it came to questions like that. Mike wasn’t sure whether she respected May’s privacy, or kept things to herself for some other reason. Amaris was not joking when she described herself as being an all knowing teenage girl. Mike would never have suspected that about her, but she paid close attention to everyone around her.

“That girl, Taylor…” Amaris murmured. “She is going to cause problems, I feel.” She tilted her head to the side. “Perhaps I should not have been so… openly passionate as a girlfriend.”

*You think?*

“Mike, I feel the need to remind you…” Amaris turned to look at him. “I cannot have anyone knowing what I truly am. That could very easily spin into disaster. I need you to be extremely cautious when dealing with this issue.  I do not think it is in our best interest to have people like her be curious about our affairs.”

“It’s not me they’re interested in, Amaris.” Mike reminded her. “Maybe you should try and be more normal? Then people wouldn’t think twice about us dating.”

“Hm.” Amaris said, twitching her pen back and forth in her fingers. “Although that is good advice, I am not sure I can do normal.”

She certainly tried, although Mike could tell right away that she was right. Although she took all of his suggestions to heart, nothing seemed to stick. She tried different kinds of outfits, tried befriending Mike’s friends (WITHOUT PREYING ON THEM, he was sure to remind her) and she ceased bragging about how awesome he was in bed. But somehow, no one seemed to get the idea that she was changing for the better. In fact, people were even more put off by them.

Mike didn’t really understand why, but eventually he decided it was just going to take time. People must have been amazed by the idea of he and Amaris being in a serious relationship, and weren’t quite ready to accept such a drastic change.

That was fine. He thought to himself. He would hang out with Amaris, watch old Helen Yuria Troy movies with her, and wait for their relationship to become old news.

“She’s really cute.” Amaris noted, as a young Helen Yuria Troy fumbled around with her dress on the screen. “I want her.”

Mike laughed, not completely sure whether or not she was kidding. “Yeah, I had such a huge crush on her when I was younger.” He confided. “She-“

Amaris stiffened a little bit, and Mike pulled back. “What is it?” He asked, his voice a little anxious.

“Your friend Taylor has come to visit.” Amaris said quietly. “I did not invite her.” She waved her hand at him. “Send her away.”

Mike nodded, and wordlessly got to his feet. He stepped across the darkened room to Amaris' front door. He opened it, and pretended to be surprised when he saw who it was.

"Taylor!" Mike exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

He did not invite him in- it wasn't his house- but he stepped out to meet her regardless, shutting the door behind him.

"How did you know I was here?" Mike asked cheerfully. "I-"

"Because you're always here, Mike." Taylor said, her voice surprisingly cool. "Always."

Mike gave her a surprised look as he elaborated.

"You come here straight after school every day." Taylor said, her voice icy. "To be with her."

"Well, yeah." Mike said. "We're dating." His voice was light and carefree, but Mike could feel that this was going to escalate into a confrontation. Taylor took a step forward.

"Is that true?" She asked him sharply. "It sure doesn't seem that way to me."

Mike frowned at him. "Come on." He said. "What else could we possibly be doing?"

"Whatever Amaris is involved in, it can't be good for you." She insisted. "Look, I know you liked her for a really long time, but she's really not someone you should be spending time around-"

"That's my decision to make, not yours." Mike said, his tone final. "Please stop bothering me about this."

He opened the door again and stepped back inside, closing the door behind him. He stepped back to find Amaris staring at the paused movie screen.

"She's not going away." Amaris murmured. "I will have to confront her myself if she dares trespass."

"You don't have to do that." Mike assured him. "I'm sure she'll calm down eventually."

Amaris pursed her lips, giving him a skeptical look, before pressing play.

…

The next day, Taylor found May standing in the hallway by herself, her phone pressed close against her ear.

“Is she alright?” It seemed to be a deep, involved conversation. Taylor hung back a little at first, a little apprehensive at how serious the usually laid back May looked. “Oh, I see…”

She paused, her eyes quickly flitting towards him standing some distance away. “Oh no, I have to go… I’ll talk to you in an hour, okay? Yes… I love you.”

She hung up the phone and turned to Taylor. Already she looked a bit more upbeat.

“Is something the matter?” Taylor asked her, concerned. “Sorry, I overheard…”

“No, everything’s fine.” May said. “It’s nothing that we need to worry about.” Despite her words, she looked a little troubled, but did not seem to want to elaborate further. “Anyway, did you need something?”

“Yeah.” Taylor said, nodding. “It’s about Mike…”

May twitched. “What about him?”

“I went to go see him last night.” Taylor said. “And he blew me off again.” May nodded, as she fingered her hair thoughtfully.

“Again?” May asked, as she took a step away from the wall. “What happened this time?” Taylor bent her head to the side.

“Uh, I went to Amaris’ house…”

May spluttered.

“And Mike answered the door…”

May shook her head and reached out to touch Taylor’s arm.

“And we had a fight.”

May had to physically restrain herself from rolling her eyes.

"Taylor…" May had to struggle to find the words. "Uh, I think that maybe you are… maybe… overreacting just a… little bit?"

"How?" Taylor asked blankly, as she brushed her long black bangs out of her face. May almost groaned.

"Uh, I think Mike is… well… I don't think he's making a GOOD decision… But I don't think bugging him about it is going to help. Especially if  you show up at his girlfriend's house about it." Taylor's face fell a little.

"So we should just let it happen?" Taylor asked, sounding downcast. May shook her head.

"No… well, sort of." She said. "We need to be there for Mike if he needs us… but maybe he won't." She shrugged. "Maybe Amaris is a nice person after all."

Taylor glowered at her. May laughed sheepishly. "Not that I think that or anything…"

When they parted ways a couple of minutes later Taylor was still thinking about Mike, and whether or not May had a point. It wasn't any of her business just who Mike spent his time around. But still, she found herself annoyed at him for not listening to her. Did he not realize just what Amaris was like?

She had dinner by herself, in her room. Her Dad was screaming at someone on the phone downstairs. She tried to ignore the shouts as she tried to make the most out of her microwaved meal. What was Mike doing right now? Surely he was with Amaris. He was always with Amaris these days…

Lightning flashed outside her window. She cast a look at it, taking in the bright flash of light, before falling off of her bed at the sight of a tall figure standing just outside her window.

She clambered back up onto the bed and stared back out into the rain. It was not just her imagination. A tall shadowy figure was standing just outside.

Taylor froze as the thing raised its hand at her, in a sort of wave, before lowering its hand back to its side. It stood in place, staring at her. It was a woman, Taylor noticed, as she slowly crept forward. It couldn't be… one of Dad's exes, could it? She certainly seemed to want to speak with her about something…

With trembling hands, Taylor approached the window and slowly unlatched it, sliding it upwards. Lightning flashed again as she looked up and stared at the woman.

"Who are you?" Taylor asked, as cold rain pattered down on her face and hair. Even at this distance she could not quite make out the woman's face.

Instead of answering the woman raised her hand towards her. Taylor flinched as a cold hand stroked her face.

"Such a pretty girl…" The woman commented. "You should never have come second to Amaris Yew."

Taylor gave a small fidget. "A-Amaris?" She repeated, her voice high pitched. "What are you-"

"Hush." The woman told her, as she gave her cheek one last pat. "I have come to help you, child. I come bearing a gift."

In her other hand she held out a beautiful white amulet. Taylor's eyes widened as she lowered the thing into her hands. Taylor grasped it tightly, admiring its pure white shine. It rather resembled the full moon.

"Thank you." Taylor breathed. "It is beautiful…" She looked up to meet the woman's stare again. Her eyes were a haunting bright blue. "But why-"

"That is no ordinary trinket." The woman told her. "It is a Mark of the Wolves… Hundreds of years ago, the English used these to fight invading vampires."

Taylor paused. "Vampires…?"

"Your friend Mike has fallen into a grave situation indeed, although he does not realize it." The woman told her. "Amaris Yew is a

Vampire who has taken Mike under her spell." She pointed a long finger at Taylor. "Only someone that truly loves Mike could possibly hope to break him free."

Taylor's fingers clutched the amulet. "What are you saying…?" She whispered.

"Every night from here on out you will be granted the power to take on a form that can match Amaris." She said. "And by day you must do all you can to rip your beloved from her clutches."

"But-"

The sharp blue eyes of the woman flashed, and Taylor stiffened. She raised her hands and shut the window, and turned around to her bed. The Mark of the Wolves clutched tightly in her hand. The woman who had been standing at the window had already vanished.

…

Even in his dreams she did not leave his side. Amaris blinked at him, several times and spoke in a low, sultry tone.

"Something is very wrong." She told him. "Come find me."

His eyes fluttered open as he sat up in his bed. There was no doubt in his mind that what he had seen was real, and Amaris was quick to confirm his suspicions.

"I can reach out to you in your dreams." She told him. "If I ever have need of you, I can reach you anywhere while you sleep."

She folded her hands in front of her on the table, her head bent forward. "A Bride of Dracula came to this place."

"W-what?" Mike asked, shocked. "Why?"

"I am not sure." Amaris admitted. "Perhaps she had some kind of business here that did not concern me, but I strongly doubt it. No, I think the Brides are taking a more hands on approach to dealing with me in the near future. It is very possible that they are gearing up for a fight."

Mike could feel his face growing green. He did not want to imagine what Amaris would have to do to defend herself against her enemies.

"If that happens, I want you to be prepared, Mike." Amaris said. "For anything that they may try." Her eyes flashed at him. "Believe me, they will try anything to get what they want."

Mike nodded, worry already welling up inside of him. The thought of something as horrifying as a Bride of Dracula had come to their town was rather unsettling. He spent the entire school day fretting over the news, to the point where teachers were calling him out on not paying attention.

"Dude, what's up?" Taylor asked, as she leaned against his lockers, casually fingering her hair. "You seem so out of it… girlfriend problems?" She sounded incredibly hopeful. She had been speaking to him as if nothing had happened the day before, but Mike did not have the heart to call her out on it. He shook his head.

"No, Amaris is great." He told her. "I'm just having a bad day." Taylor nodded, looking a little disappointed.

"Well, I'm always here if you need me.' Taylor said, laughing a little in an awkward way. She wasn't really being herself, Mike noticed shrewdly. Amaris had been spot on when she had said that she was jealous. Mike was beginning to realize that Taylor liked Amaris too.

"Have you figured out what the Bride had been doing here?" Mike asked Amaris over lunch. Amaris shook her head, as she slowly scratched at the back of his hand with a plastic fork… another one of her strange habits.

"Unfortunately no." Amaris admitted. "I have kept my eyes open, but nothing seems to be out of place." She stared at him with her wide, hypnotic eyes. "I wonder if, perhaps, you have noticed something, even if you have not realized it."

"Other than Taylor being weird, nothing."

Amaris nodded faintly, "Yes…" She murmured. "Taylor does seem very interested in us, doesn't she…?" She tilted her head to the side,

clearly thinking deeply. “She has no family history in hunting vampires, does she?” She asked. “I’ve noticed that she’s a lot more physically active than most girls…”

“Uh, I don’t think so…?” Mike said, wondering whether or not Amaris was really being serious. “Uh, do Vampire Hunters exist, then…?”

“If it exists, man will try to kill it.” Amaris sniffed. “They very much exist.”

“Could Taylor be one? What should I be looking out for?”

“In the modern age, all Vampire Hunters are female.” Amaris said. “This is meant to be make preying on them more difficult for the Brides of Dracula… although hasn’t helped them a whole lot, in my opinion.”

“What else?”

“Hm.” Amaris murmured. “They tend to stick out. They’re not accustomed to modern, every day life at all.”

“That doesn’t sound like Taylor at all.” Mike noted. She was a tomboy, but he would never have described her as being out of place.

“I see.” Amaris said, her head bent. “Perhaps we are on the wrong scent. But I must ask you to keep a close eye on her regardless.”

He did not have to try to keep an eye on Taylor. It seemed almost as if she were following him around. She was everywhere, and was saying hello to him every time they met eyes. There was something very odd at work here, but Mike certainly didn’t feel as if Amaris’ theory about Taylor being a Vampire Hunter was on the mark at all. Taylor was just being exceptionally annoying, nothing more.

Later that night he found himself in Amaris’ house, checking his bag to make sure that he had everything for tomorrow morning. Amaris was standing by the window, staring out of it. She looked even more stunning once the sun set, Mike was beginning to realize.

“Something is wrong.” Amaris spoke up. “I want to walk you home tonight.”

“You sure?” Mike asked. “Normally a man walks the lady home-“ He was trying to be flippant.

“Your human customs do not matter to me. Your safety comes first.” Amaris told him, in a no nonsense kind of way. Mike fell silent. Amaris, he felt, became noticeably more intimidating and aggressive once the sun set. “Let us go.”

She donned her fancy black hat and cloak and led him out into the night. Mike could not tear his eyes away from her. She seemed almost magnetic in the moonlight.

“As I thought.” Amaris breathed. “We have a stalker.” She reached a gloved hand forward and took Mike’s hand. “You and she have a lot in common after all.”

“She…?”

Something big darted across the street behind them. Mike whirled to look at it, his eyes wide. Amaris did not turn around. She merely bent her head.

“I see now.” She breathed. “That is the game they are playing.”

She let go of Mike and turned around in the street, as she popped her cloak open. “Go home.” She said quietly. “It is me she wants.”

Mike stared at her, worried. “But-“

“Go!”

Mike turned and ran down the street. Amaris stood in the dark, empty street, her glowing eyes narrowed at the darkness.

“Show yourself, Taylor.” She breathed. “Let me have a look at you…”

A powerful paw stepped out into the street. Amaris stared as a large, wolf like creature sauntered into view. Standing about twice as tall as she, it stood on its hind legs and bared its sharp fangs in an intense grimace.

“There are many kinds of werewolves.” Amaris noted, completely unafraid. “They are mostly known for appearing during the full

moon, but sometimes humans can force the transformation through artificial means. Such as holding the Mark of the Wolves."

The thing growled at her, as it got down on all fours and stared at her hungrily. On it neck, Amaris could clearly make out the accursed object in question.

"Are the Brides of Dracula truly so naïve that they think that toy can even slow me down?" Amaris asked it, her voice cold. "And you, Taylor… are you truly so desperate for Mike's attention that you would die for it?"

The beast lunged for her furiously, slobber running down its mouth. Amaris moved just as quickly, raising her hand try and rip the Mark of the Wolves from her neck. However, Taylor proved herself to be quite aware of her surroundings. She slapped her away with her forepaws, and Amaris was pushed backward, further down the street.

Unharmed, Amaris stared at it coldly. "I could turn you back into your ordinary self and leave your cold and naked body for the homeless." She said. "Or I could kill you right here. It is your choice, Taylor."

Taylor crept closer, growling wildly. Amaris stood tall, staring at it completely unintimidated. Taylor stopped in place, staring at her.

And then, just like that, she turned and raced away, down the street and out of sight.

Amaris sighed, as she turned around and wrapped the cloak around herself, trying to make herself seem more presentable.  Taylor was not scared of her. She was simply not quite used to her newfound powers just yet. She would be back.

Chapter 4

"Vampires vs Werewolves?" Mike asked disbelievingly. "Are you kidding me?"

"You better be Team Vampire." Amaris told him, as she buttered his toast for him. "For your sake." The two were standing in Amaris'

kitchen, discussing the night before. Mike lay his head on the table.

“Was Taylor always a Werewolf?”

“No.” Amaris told him, as she patted his shoulder, gently massaging his muscles. “She has come into possession of an amulet that gives her that shape. It is very dangerous, even in the hands of a strong capable mind. I suspect your friend is going to do something stupid with it. “

“Such as coming after you?”

Amaris’ lips twitched. “Precisely.”

“Why?’

“Oh, don’t worry about that.” Amaris said, as she across the table to reach for his bag. “But I don’t think I’ll be coming to school today. I doubt it is a good idea for me to be so close to her while she has such powers.”

She smiled at him. “I’m counting on you to keep an eye on her for me.” She said. “We need to get that thing away from her. For our sake… and for hers.”

Mike nodded, his throat a little dry. He felt a little anxious. He had not actually seen Taylor in her beast form, but the experience with the Shark Man still weighed heavily on his mind. Amaris lived in a completely different world than he or his friends. And he was beginning to feel as if she was pulling him into it with her.

Taylor, at school, did not seem any different than the day before. Bouncy, energetic, and talkative. Mike found her more unbearable than usual. She kept speaking to him about the most inane, pointless things.

“So where is Amaris?” Taylor asked innocently. “Did you kick her to the curb yet?” Mike’s lips curled.

“No.”

“Not yet, you mean?” She asked him.

“I don’t think I want to end the relationship.” She tutted and leaned in close to him.

“Why is that?”

He looked at her. “Because… because I like her, that’s why.” He said. He blinked, suddenly feeling a little uncertain. The feeling passed quickly. Amaris had told him that Taylor had acquired some kind of supernatural power. She could not be trusted.

“You like her…” Taylor probed. “Why?”

He opened his mouth and then shut it again. His lips formed a tight line as he turned away. Taylor laughed a little as she leaned in, trying to grab his hand. He pulled away, and after a brief moment’s pause, got to his feet and stepped away without another word. Taylor was being ridiculous.

…

“I believe she can only transform at night.” Amaris told him, as he had dinner in her apartment. She had again cooked for him, and Mike was beginning to become impressed with the vast knowledge and expertise in the kitchen. Everything he tasted from her quickly became one of his favorite dishes. “The Full Moon was over a week ago, and I find it curious how she was hanging off of your arm all day instead of coming after me.” She said. “We will have to wait and see, of course, but I think that is everything we need to know.”

She was so smart. Mike thought to himself as he silently ate his meal. And so strong willed, and confident. She wasn’t anything like other girls.

Amaris smiled at him as she stroked his face. “This confrontation will involve you somehow, I think.” She said. “I have a hard time coming up with another explanation with why a girl like Taylor would want to pick a fight with me.”

A shadow fell across her face. “Especially since she is aware of what I am.” Mike recoiled slightly at the sudden cold turn her voice took. It made him shudder a little.

“Is she going to come back tonight?” He asked.

“Almost certainly.”

Mike did not go home that night. Instead he sat up with Amaris and worked on his schoolwork. Amaris, calm and collected, kept telling him to relax and focus.

“I will take care of her.” Amaris told him. “Do not worry.” Mike nodded. Her words did calm him somewhat, but he could not help but worry about how the situation would escalate.

It was not long after the sun set that Amaris suddenly got to her feet.

“She has arrived.”

She quickly donned her hat, gloves, and cloak and stepped to the front door. Mike followed, hot on her heels. Her long black hair swayed back and forth with every step.

The door opened before she even touched it. It slowly creaked open to reveal Taylor, in full wolf form, sitting on the concrete outside of her house. She growled as Amaris stepped forward.

“A beast!” Amaris cried, sounding surprised, throwing her arms into the air. The pitch of her voice was much higher than normal. “How dreadful!”

Taylor bared her teeth at her wildly. “Do not play games with me, Vampire.” It snarled. “Let him go.”

Mike peered at her from behind the door blankly. He was not aware that she could talk while like that. Taylor’s grimace began even more pronounced, showing even more vicious teeth.

“Mike!”

“Mike, darling.” Amaris said carelessly, as she waved her hand at him. There was no trace of her previous show of fear. “Can you go make me a cup of tea, please?”

“Sure.” Mike said, right away. “The usual?”

“Three teaspoons of your blood instead of two.”

Mike obediently turned and stepped back into the house. The door slammed shut behind him. Taylor growled and took a step forward.

"What did you do to him?"

Amaris smiled coyly at her as she flipped her hair backward. "Isn't it obvious?" She asked. "He fell in love with me."

"He is your slave!"

"Incorrect. We're not MARRIED, we are actually-"

Taylor bent her long, powerful legs and leapt forward at her with a cry. Amaris, immediately, balled her fist and caught the thing in the jaw. The incredible blow sent the wolf tumbling back into the concrete. Amaris massaged her hand as Taylor squirmed around below her feet.

"Oh, sweet little Taylor…" Amaris murmured, as she slowly descended the stairs to her fallen enemy. "You truly believe that Mike would have been happier with you."

Taylor growled as she clawed the concrete at her feet Amaris did not blink as she watched her enemy writhe on the ground.

"Even a true werewolf would have trouble matching me." Amaris commented as Taylor painstakingly dragged herself to her feet. "You are nothing but a child in a Halloween costume." She grinned savagely. "Oh, how I will enjoy sucking every last ounce of your blood dry…"

Taylor did not charge her again. She stood there in front of her, eyeing her warily. Amaris spread her arms wide.

"Please do not tell me that you were not aware of my powers." Amaris said, as she stepped down from the last step of the stairs leading up to her door onto the concrete proper, her heels clicking against the ground. "Although I am no longer affluential politically, I very much remain one of the most powerful Vampires on this Earth. Far more so than the harlots who gifted you that Amulet."

She slammed her foot onto the ground. The concrete around it shattered, sending little shards of it floating upwards into the air.

They floated around Amaris as if they being held aloft by some invisible creature.

“One of my powers, as you have already experienced, is exceptional strength.” Amaris told her, as she bent her elbow towards Taylor. “And another… is Telekinesis.”

She shot her arm forward, and the pieces of concrete shot towards Taylor with exceptional force. Taylor cried out in fear and pain as the small, hard objects slammed into her, all over her body.

“I could have easily pierced your eyes and heart, liver, or kidneys.” Amaris said conversationally. “But I am very well aware that you could easily recover from those injuries by returning to your normal state.”

Her hair began to flow wildly behind her. “You will not truly suffer until you are yourself again.”

Taylor whined in pain, and tried to back away from her. Amaris continued stepping forward, staring straight into Taylor’s bestial eyes with a furious, intimidating gaze.

“He is mine.” Amaris whispered, as she whipped her hand downward. A car from down the street jolted forward, skidding across the ground. Taylor whirled around to face it, and was hit head on. She howled in pain as she rolled across the street. The car stopped right where she had been standing, and Amaris stepped past it, trailing her hand over it sensually, as she approached Taylor’s still body.

“Taylor Bell. Roadkill.” Amaris said smugly as she approached. “A fitting tombstone-“

Taylor leapt upwards, jaws snapping. Amaris did not flinch as the jaws wrapped around her. Already her body had turned into mist.

Taylor roared in pain and rage as she lashed out her arms at the mist, but to no avail. It floated upwards, away from her. Amaris appeared again lying on the front of the car, facing Taylor with a bored expression. She shifted her long legs along the hood of the car as she stared down at Taylor.

“You are no match for me, girl.” Amaris said quietly. “But your struggling amuses me.” Taylor grimaced as she took a step forward, her jaws wide. Amaris did not even blink as the car shot forward again. This time Taylor let out a panicked cry, and tried to leap upward, on top of her. But Amaris was prepared for that. She rolled around on the hood of the car and brought her leg upward, bringing it back down onto Taylor’s skull with a mighty blow. Taylor slammed against the hood of the car, and then was hit again by the sheer momentum of the vehicle.

Amaris stopped the car again. She could make out Taylor’s ragged breathing from under the vehicle. “Tough little girl, are you?” Amaris asked. “I suppose all of those beatings from Daddy resulted in something positive…”

Taylor whimpered in pain. Amaris trailed her hand over the hood of the car as she leaned over the side at her. Satisfied that she wasn’t again being tricked, Amaris slid off the roof of the car and stepped onto the pavement.

“What a cute little trinket you have there.” Amaris said, as she leaned down and pulled at the Mark of the Wolves wrapped around Taylor’s neck. Taylor was too weak to resist as Amaris ripped it off of her body. Amaris stood, clenching the accursed thing in her hands, as Taylor began to transform back into her normal self.

“Why, aren’t you something.” Amaris observed, as she ran her hand along Taylor’s naked body. She wrapped her arm around her and hoisted her upward. Taylor’s head hung limp as Amaris carefully carried her back to the door. All around them a thick, inscrutable mist began to swirl around them, blocking off everything that had happened from the rest of the public.

Mike answered the door with a numb look on his face as Amaris stepped through the door, Taylor in her arms. “Amaris!” He asked, alarmed, as she stepped past him. “What-“

“She is exhausted.” Amaris murmured, as she stepped into the living room. “But I fortunately did not have to kill her.” Mike followed her

into the room, eyes wide, as she laid the girl onto the couch. Amaris met his eyes.

“Where is my tea?”

“Oh, I… Uh, left it in the kitchen…”

She glared at him and he immediately turned and left the room. Amaris turned back to Taylor, staring straight at her face.

Mike returned quickly with her tea and set it on the table beside her, right within her reach. Amaris did not move to take it. In fact she did not move at all. Mike stood watching nearby, unwilling to move either. Just what was she planning?

They stood like that in silence for what felt like hours. Mike never considered asking why they were doing this. And then, finally, at long last, Taylor began to stir. She shifted about on the couch, as if waking up from a deep sleep, and groggily twitched her legs.

“Listen to my words, Taylor Bell.” Amaris said softly. “Listen only to me.”

Taylor gave a start, and froze. Her eyes met Amaris’, and suddenly they seemed to go completely blank. Amaris raised her hand and waved it in front of Taylor’s face.

“I am hypnotized.” She said softly, her voice sultry and becoming.

“I am hypnotized.”

“My mind is yours to do with as you please.”

“My mind is yours to do with as you please.”

“I am not your enemy.”

Mike gave a surprised start.

“I am not your enemy.”

“The Brides of Dracula have manipulated me.”

“The Brides of Dracula have manipulated me.”

“I must forget everything about tonight.”

“I must forget everything about tonight.”

“I must forget about the Mark of the Wolves.”

“I must forget about the Mark of the Wolves.”

“I must forget about the Brides of Dracula.”

“I must forget about the Brides of Dracula.”

“I must forget about Mike Rose, and his beautiful girlfriend Amaris Yew.”

“I must forget about Mike Rose, and his beautiful girlfriend Amaris Yew.”

Amaris gave a satisfied nod, and Taylor slumped into sleep again. She turned to the table and allowed herself a sip of tea. “Very refreshing.” She said. “You are not hopeless after all.”

“Thank you.” Mike said. “Amaris… is Taylor….?”

“She will be fine.” Amaris said shortly. She leaned in closer to Taylor, and rubbed her forehead. “She was merely a pawn. I doubt she will bother us again.”

She glanced at Mike. “You are lucky to be in a relationship with me.” She said. “Any other girl would have killed her, if given the chance.”

Mike nodded. “I am lucky.” He said. Amaris turned back to Taylor and tilted her head to the side.

“Although I have hypnotized her to forget all about you, it is possible that she may relapse if she encounters something that reminds her of what happened here tonight.” Amaris said softly. “And remember everything.” She shot a dark look at Mike. “That must not happen.” She said sharply. “Do you understand me?”

“Yes.”

Amaris cast a look back down on Taylor’s naked body. A long, thin scrape ran along her leg. A small amount of blood was protruding from it, and it was driving her nuts. Restraining herself always made her extremely irritable. But she could not have the girl and have people ask too many questions. It was best to just let her go.

She had far better prey on hand at all times now. She did not need her. Later that night, after Mike had gone home to his parents, Amaris and Taylor walked home together in the darkness alone. Taylor sleepwalked beside Amaris, who kept a firm grip on her at all times. Amaris had not been able to find her clothes, so she had been forced to take some of her things and force them on the slightly larger girl.

“Hey ladies! What are you doing out so late-?”

Amaris shot an evil look at the man who had spoken, and he collapsed to the ground in a heap. She turned her head back to the front of the sidewalk ,and continued walking, Taylor in tow. She lived quite a ways away from Amaris… whereas Amaris lived in a relatively well off neighborhood, Taylor lived in an in near poverty.

“Your Father is out drinking and trying to sleep with women half his age.” Amaris commented, as they approached her front door. “You need not worry about him being home tonight.”

Taylor blinked. She was beginning to snap out of the hypnosis. Amaris had not made eye contact with her since they had left the house.

“Amaris…”

Amaris stiffened. “Yes?”

“Why are you doing this…?” She whispered. “You are a Vampire preying on… that… Mike…” She was somewhat incoherent, but Amaris had a general idea of what she was trying to say.

So she was still fixated on that, was she? She had had so many things to cover during her hypnosis, she must not have beaten it through her head enough that she was not to talk about Mike anymore.

“You are a Vampire…” Taylor went on. “And yet you… love him…?”

Amaris stared at her.

“Love?” She asked blankly. “No. I am giving him what he wants, and in return… I give him what he wants. He is mine, and I am his.”

…

The next afternoon, Amaris and Mike found themselves sitting in Amaris' kitchen, staring at each other. The Mark of the Wolves sat on the table between them.

"You have seen what the Brides of Dracula are willing to do to get to me." Amaris said quietly, "They will use your friends and family as weapons against us."

She leaned in closer. "I cannot stress this enough, my love." She said. "But you must distance yourself from them. In order to protect them from our enemies, you must not speak to them anymore. Taylor, May, your parents… none of them must know what I am, and what we are doing."

Mike nodded as Amaris continued. "You are precious to me." She said. "Your blood is like… the finest wine." She stroked the wineglass sitting on the table longingly. "I am already feeling much stronger than I have in many, many years. I will not let you be taken from me."

She nodded at him, her dark eyes glinting. "I cannot ask you to withdraw from school and live here with me." She said. "That would draw too much attention to us. But I want you to exercise caution in who you speak to, and what you speak about. Anyone you are close to will be used against us. If you truly love me, you must be willing to give up everything else."

"I… understand." Mike said slowly. Amaris smiled, as she leaned her face close to his. "

You are wonderful." She breathed. "You… love me?"

In response he leaned forward closer, and surprised her by pressing his lips against hers. Surprised by the sudden contact, Amaris tilted her head back slightly. "Mmm…" She hummed, taking in the sensation. Mike pulled away, clearly very pleased.

"How… do you feel?" He asked her, a little cautiously. Amaris stared at him, trying to figure out what he was trying to get at.

"I… am happy that you are happy." She said, smiling, as she patted his arm. "Oh, my love. You are such a wonderful kisser…"

He leaned in again, and Amaris obliged him. She allowed him to kiss her again, and his hand gently wrapped around her back. She wondered whether he was trying to instigate sex. She had teased him enough tonight, she thought.

"You must rest." Amaris told him gently, her hypnotic eyes meeting his. "You must prepare for your new life tomorrow."

The Mark of the Wolves slid across the table and into her hand. She took, and gently pressed it into his hand.

…

The United States Department of Supernatural Defense was still very much a small, up and coming branch of the United States military. Traditionally the United States had simply utilized traditional military tactics against the supernatural, but over the past year it had become apparent that there was a need for a specialized branch of the military dedicated specifically to fighting powerful supernatural threats.

The supernatural had been feared and hated since the day man began to walk the Earth. It would be no small task to integrate them into normal society. The more he began to understand their various leaders and communities around the world of the supernatural, the more he began to believe that a unity between them and normal folks could never actually happen.

"She's here."

Glover thanked the woman on the phone before hanging up. One step at a time. He told himself. They would start off small, on an individual basis, and work their way to building a program that was fair for everyone. For now, they had to focus on the task at hand. How to handle a vampire.

He had received a report from his people that the supernatural activity in a certain town was unusually high. Unexplained markings

on buildings, claw marks, black flames that burned for three days and nights before fizzling out, and destroyed pavement and homes.

It seemed as if two particularly nasty beings were having a spat with one another. And neither side wanted the authorities to be involved. One party was still unknown to them, but the department believed the other to be a Vampire.

Discussion  of the situation led the team to decide that an expert should be brought in. And today that was just what Glover going to do.

A knock came at the door. The Vampire Hunter had arrived.

"Come in." He said, as he got to his feet.

She was led into the room by his secretary, who smiled at him warmly. He ignored her, and focused his attention on the young woman standing behind her. She was, to his surprise, completely masked by a bright yellow scarf wrapped tightly around her face. It was still warm, so the sight of it was somewhat off putting.

Despite not being able to make out of her face, however, Glover was able to make out some other key features. Her blonde hair, for instance, was relatively short and neat. Her build was lithe and athletic, and she seemed relatively young. How young, he could not say.

"Bonjour." She said, nodding her head slightly. She reached out a small hand to him and he took it. It was not a proper handshake, he was surprised to see. She offered him her hand as if she expected him to kiss it.

"Bonjour." He returned. "I hope you had a pleasant flight."

"It was dreadful, actually." The girl noted, as she pulled her hand away from him. "I loathe international flights." She paused. "Ah, my English is not the best…" She said. "You understand me, non?"

He was able to make out a distinct accent, but she was perfectly fluent. He made sure to tell her so.

“Good, good.” The girl said absently, nodding her head. “That’s good. I was worried… I have not been to England since I was a girl, and to America… never.”

She raised her hands in a defeated looking gesture. “The world has changed.” She said, her voice grim. “I fear what situation has led you to call me here.”

Despite her words and expressions, Glover honestly thought she was putting on a front for his benefit. Her eyes shone with excitement.

“I am glad that you are here.” He told her.He gestured for her to sit down across from his desk, and she did so. She daintily crossed her legs and watched him as he sat down at his big wooden desk.

“You are trying to deal with a vampire.” The girl noted.

“That is correct.” Glover said, as he cast a look at her profile, which he had been looking at just before she arrived. Although there was no photograph, there was plenty of information. The Woman, Soleil Blade, came from a long line of Vampire Hunters that had a history of fighting some of the most powerful Vampires in the World. It was said that one of the reasons Dracula chose to infiltrate England rather than France was to avoid having to deal with them.

“Very well.” Soleil said. “What Class of Vampire is it?”

Glover looked up at her. “Class?”

Soleil bent her head, her fingers pressed against her forehead. Glover immediately knew he had asked a rather ignorant question, but he pressed on anyway.

“I am still adapting to learning about these things. Your expertise is invaluable.”

That seemed to placate her a little. She sat up a little straighter.

“Vampires are generally classified by their characteristics, lineage, and their age.” She explained. “Not all Vampires have the same kinds of powers. They tend to differentiate amongst themselves from region to region. And of course all Vampires are known to get more powerful as they age.” She tapped her finger against her knee. “For

example, my family has been hunting the Spanish Vampire Amaris Yew for about four hundred years. She is what we call a Dark Vampire… she predates the Renaissance, and therefore was not even phased by the improvements in medicine, technology, and Vampire Hunting techniques that drove most weaker Vampires to extinction. The sun itself barely even weakens her these days." She paused. "Of course, not all Vampires are that powerful." She said. "Even the Brides of Dracula themselves, the current Lords of the Noctis, are not anywhere near that old and never step foot outside of Romania. In fact I would say generally speaking Vampires are pretty low threats to humans in the modern era."

Glover smiled ruefully. "If you know how to deal with them." He said gently. Soleil met his eyes, thinking for a moment.

"Perhaps I do overestimate the effectiveness of a military against these things." She said. "I will do everything in my power to find this Vampire for you."

She got to her feet. "I will look into this situation for you, and provide advice on how best to proceed in the future." She said. "But I must tell you that I am not sure how long I can afford to do so. The Hunter's Guild will likely want me back if something were to happen back home."

"Perhaps we can do something to help you if that comes to pass." Glover suggested. "It would do my people a lot of good to learn from the best."

Soleil turned back to look at him.

"Perhaps." She said quietly. And then she was gone.

….

Amaris lazily leaned over the pool table, cue in hand, as she stared at the balls on the table hungrily. "Each of you WILL go back to where you belong." She hissed, as she brought the cue back.

Mike watched her, amused, as she poked at the ball far too gently. It did not even hit the end of the table, it simply rolled a couple of inches and stopped. Amaris scowled at it.

“Fool.” She breathed, as she glared down at it. “I never tolerate disobedience…”

The ball began to jitter and shake, and soon was rolling around of its own accord. Mike thought it was time to step in.

“No cheating, Amaris.” He reminded her. “I can’t do that, remember?”

Amaris pouted as the ball rolled to a stop. Mike stepped up to it and put it back where it had been lying before. Amaris scowled at him.

“It was way closer to the six ball than that.”

“No it wasn’t!” Mike said indignantly. Amaris raised her cue stick at him threateningly. “Are you calling me a liar?” She breathed. Mike opened his mouth to argue further, but before he could she broke down into giggles.

“Okay, okay, you got me.” She said, laughing. “But I would like to score one legitimate point…”

Her laughter faded. Her eyes fell on a person just behind Mike and her expression became haunting. “You-“

Mike turned around to find a girl with black bangs staring at him. She shifted about uncomfortably. “Um, h-hello…” She said. Her voice was shaky and empty. Mike stared at her, hardly daring to believe it. “Taylor?” He repeated. Her eyes widened in surprise as she took a step closer to him. Before she could reach him, however, Amaris stepped in between them, glowering at her. Taylor looked past her, straight into Mike’s face.

“How…. Did you know my name…?” She murmured. “I… feel as if… I knew you from somewhere…”

“You do not.” Amaris said sharply, as her hand cupped Taylor’s chin. Taylor flinched as Amaris pulled her head over to look at her. Amaris stared into her eyes, and Taylor’s hand went limp.

“Go home and read a Jane Austen novel or something.” Amaris sniffed, as she pulled away from her. “Leave us alone.”

Taylor obediently turned on her heel and walked off without another word. Amaris whirled around to look at him accusingly.

"You may not be aware of this." She said, her voice icy. "But if you hang around her… at all… than that is going to undo my hypnosis to forget you."

She flipped her hair, smacking him in the face. "So stay away from her. For your own good."

She gave him a dark look. "And for hers."

She took his arm and pressed her head against his shoulder, sighing contentedly. "Besides, I like having you all to myself." She purred. "You… complete me."

Mike wrapped his arm around her protectively as they stepped out into the street. It was still early evening, and quite a pretty sight. Amaris smiled as Mike led her down the street, back to her place.

"I had never played pool before." She confessed. "Being a vampire makes it difficult to do these things. Perhaps one day I'll be able to score a point."

"Practice makes perfect." Mike reminded her. She laughed as they stepped up to her door.

"Is this the part where I invite you in for sex?" She asked, as she trailed her hand along the railing. Mike stared at her expectantly.

"No, it's the part where I tease you relentlessly and never actually follow through." Amaris said. "Good-night."

She ended up shutting the door in his face and turned around to her room. "What a virgin." She said aloud. She wondered how long she could string him along for before he got sick of it. She was becoming increasingly amazed how little hypnosis she needed to get him to do what she wanted.

She spent the rest of her night reading and preparing for the following day. She had no plans to meet with Mike again. She had already had her fill of his blood the previous day, and was looking forward to some quality time on her own for a change.

Pretending to care about someone was exhausting, Amaris thought, as she absentmindedly ran her fingers down her throat. She had no idea how normal girls did it. Perhaps if Disney were to make a movie about a Vampire, she would understand the appeal a bit better.

She read her books until early in the morning. Although she took in the words on the page, her mind was on other things. Namely her current situation with Mike.

She could not explain it, but his blood made her feel more alive and powerful than she had in years. Wounds that had refused to heal for years evaporated overnight. Powers that had weakened considerably over time had come back to her stronger than ever. Another couple of weeks of this, and she would be at the height of her powers.

That thought excited her. But it worried her too. If she were to lose Mike now, she would suddenly lose her unexpected trump card. She could NOT let anyone, or anything, take him from her. Not a werewolf, not another Vampire, and certainly not Death.

He was hers and hers alone.

…

Soleil Blade stood at the highest possible point of the city, staring down at the lights below with a steely gaze. At this altitude the wind was stronger than it would have been on the ground. Her scarf billowed out behind her as she surveyed the surrounding area.

"America." She said to herself. "The Land of the Free."

These people were completely helpless against a vampire. They could not hope to defend themselves if it decided to come after them, no matter who the Vampire was. She had tried to use what little information the government had provided her to try and isolate a possible identity. The Hunter's Guild  published their Most Wanted List annually. There were so few powerful Vampires in the World that they could easily fit an in depth description and background on each in a single, hard printed tome. Soleil had studied the 2018 edition thoroughly, specifically searching for Vampires that had been interested in traveling to America, and found nothing. Either the

Vampire was too weak to be notable, or one of the big names had not been sticking to their typical M.O. She was leaning towards the former, but it had been a long worry among the Guild that creatures such as Vampires would eventually migrate to countries like America or Japan that had no history of protecting themselves against them. It was very possible that Vampires that had not been sighted in a while, such as Grimjaw or Sonny the Smile, had traveled here in hopes of throwing off their pursuers.

Soleil stepped to the edge of her perch, staring down at the city below. She leaned forward, and dived downward, head first into the concrete below. The air slammed into her face as she fell. She raised her arms before she slammed onto the concrete of the roof, and her momentum came to a sudden halt. She hit the ground gently, stepped forward onto the roof, her eyes facing straight ahead.

## Chapter 5

"A Hunter is among us."

Mike looked up to find Amaris giving him that concerned, thoughtful look she used whenever something was wrong. He grabbed her arm and pulled her a little closer.

"What do you mean?"

Amaris turned away from him, her expression stony and cold. "A certain someone has been following us." She said quietly. "Someone I know very well."

"Who is it?"

She raised her hand to her face and brushed her hair back. "That should be none of your concern." She said, her voice quiet. "Hunters are meant to protect people, not rip them away from the ones that love them."

She did not elaborate more. Mike kept his eyes peeled for any signs of the stalker, but to no avail. He saw nothing.

"Are you sure that we're being followed…?" Mike asked cautiously. They had taken a walk around town. Although it was rather pleasant and different compared to what they usually did, Mike was starting to feel anxious about when they would get home.

"I would never lie to you, my love." Amaris said softly, as they came to a stop. They stood overlooking a large pond. Some distance away some kids were feeding bread to a gaggle of baby ducks. "We are in very great danger."

"Maybe we should get off the street." Mike suggested, casting a wary eye towards the kids. "Someone may get hurt."

"I would never let that happen." Amaris told him, as they began walking again. "I never allow bystanders near my battles."

She stared at him.

"I am more concerned about you."

"I'm fine."

“You won’t be, if this girl gets a hold of you.” Amaris said darkly, as she turned away again. “She will insist on getting you involved. I guarantee it. I must think about your safety for the immediate future.”

Mike stopped in the middle of the street. Amaris turned around to look at him, her hair billowing out behind her. “Does the thought of that scare you?” She asked.

“No… no.” Mike said, his voice quiet. “I’m just… I just feel…” He laughed a little, in that empty, hollow sort of way that Amaris knew was an attempt to try and reassure her that he was fine.

Amaris stepped up to him, staring intently at his expression, trying to decide what the best move would be.

“I will be protecting you.” She said. “You have nothing to fear as long as you do as I say.” She reached out a long finger and trailed it across his face. “Do you understand, my love?” Mike nodded, but said nothing. Satisfied that he was content, Amaris turned away from him.

“She can come for us at any time.” Amaris told him. “Be prepared.” And that was the last they discussed the situation.

…

Soleil tapped her foot against the ground, her arms crossed as she glared at the crowd, her bright blue eyes sizing up the people in the area. Most everyone was talking amongst themselves or laughing, but Soleil was all alone, trying to focus. The Vampire was here, but it had tried losing her in this crowd. It been luring a potential victim around for quite some time, but did not seem interested in eating until it lost her. It had taken its prey and tried surrounding itself with as many people are possible, in hopes of trying to lose her. Soleil frowned to herself as she pushed her way through the crowd, trying to find some sign of her prey.

“Oh, hey!”

Someone had spoken to her. She jolted her head to the side, surprised, to find a smiling young man leaning into her.

“Hey.” He said, his voice low and friendly. “I-“

He wasn’t a Vampire. Soleil thought, her mind racing, as she pushed past him and back into the crowd. That brief moment of distraction was all that her target had needed. She (She was quite sure it was female) had gotten away.

“Damn.”

She raised her hand to her blonde hair and brushed it aside, trying to evaluate where exactly it had gone. A couple of people passing by gave her looks, but she ignored them. She was busy trying to think of the map she of the town she had studied before arriving. Where would a Vampire run off to? In the end she did not know the city well enough to make that call on the spot, and she was forced to start moving again. Another passerby in the street shot her a look and a smile, but she stepped past him and off into a smaller street. From there she stepped off of the road entirely into an empty alley, and without a second thought she climbed the wall, back onto the top of the building. She stepped over the side of the building to look at the surrounding area, trying to get an idea of just where exactly her target had gone.

She could be anywhere. Soleil thought in frustration, as she tried to picture the map in her head. For all she knew her lair could be in any one of these buildings. She could have just popped into anywhere off the street. But searching them all thoroughly without a warrant would spell disaster for her. This time she would have to let the Vampire go.

She was patient. She would find her mark. Soon.

…

“I think it is best that we stay apart for a while.” Amaris said. “I only want to see you here at meal times… Understand?”

They were sitting in Amaris’ apartment, having a meal. Mike nodded at Amaris as he spooned some soup into his mouth.

“I understand…”

“Good.” Amaris said, satisfied, as she turned to look outside the window. “This girl… She will not rest until she has me.”

“Girl?”

“She is young.” Amaris said quietly, her eyes falling on the table before her. “Your age, in fact. But ambitious. Perhaps too ambitious.”

“What do you mean?”

Amaris did not answer him. She stood and left the room without another word. Mike did not watch her go, instead choosing to spoon his soup.

It would not be long now, Amaris thought, as she stood by her largest window, staring out into the darkness. The Hunter would confront her. Soon, very, very soon.

Amaris did not flinch as the glass in the window shattered. Pieces of glass went flying straight at her. Her eyes flashed, and the glass went flying away from her, slamming into the walls, floor, and ceiling surrounding her.

“Ha!”

In a flash a bright yellow figure leapt inside, brandishing a sword. Amaris calmly stepped backward, narrowly avoiding the blade as it whizzed in front of her face.

Instead of bringing the blade back up for another strike, the Hunter quickly raced forward to close the gap in between them. Amaris’ coffee table suddenly lurched forward in between them, and the Hunter let out a cry as she slashed the thing in twain with a single stroke. The two pieces fell on either side of her as she continued her rapid advance. Amaris stared at the Hunter as she began to lower the blade again-

“Stop!”

The Hunter backed away at the sound of the new voice, whirling around to face the door to the kitchen. Standing there was Mike, looking absolutely horrified.

“You… who are you?” He asked. The Hunter grimaced at him.

“I could ask you the same question!” She snapped, as her eyes fell back on Amaris. “Leave this place! Now!”

Amaris smiled as she ruffled out the kinks in her clothes. “Oh, Soleil.’ She drawled, as she stepped around the mess they had made and towards the kitchen door. Soleil watched, surprised, as Mike stepped towards her as well. “Mike is my dear guest.”

Mike stepped in between them. Amaris stepped behind him, trailing her fingers across his neck. She peered out at Soleil from the back of Mike’s head. “It would be quite rude if you asked him to leave, considering this is not and never will be your home.”

Soleil took a step forward, taking in the situation with a calculated, professional gaze. “You… boy.” She rasped, as she raised the point of the sword and pointed it at him. “What is your relationship with this woman?”

Mike balked at the sight of the sword, pressing back against Amaris. He was clearly a little intimidated by her steely glare. “I… uh, I don’t…”

“We’re in love.” Amaris said, as she fluttered her fingers against Mike’s neck affectionately. “He is mine, and there is nothing you can do to separate us.”

“Is this another one of your games, Lady Yew?” Soleil asked, as she cautiously stepped forward. “What are you planning?” She glared at Mike intently. “What is this boy to you, really?”

Amaris smiled at her as she continued running her fingers around Mike’s neck. “He is precious.” She said. “He is someone to protect.”

“Is that so?” Soleil asked. “Then why are you using him like a shield?”

The room fell dead silent. Mike suddenly could not breath. He could feel a sinister, dark aura behind him.

“I am merely trying to impress upon you that I mean him no harm.” Amaris said, her voice silky smooth but somehow dangerous. “I never thought to-“

Soleil brandished the weapon in front of her, glaring daggers at her. “You are a filthy liar, vampire.” She snapped. “Boy! You mustn’t believe her words. She-“

She fell silent as Mike started back at her, his expression cold. She lowered the weapon and spoke in a much more gentle tone.

“I do not know what she has been telling you.” Soleil said softly. “But I assure you that whatever she is offering you, this isn’t worth it.” She readied her weapon. “Out of my way.”

The response was immediate. “No.”

Soleil grimaced, pulling back slightly. “Boy, if you don’t get away I may have to hurt you-“

“Do not worry, my love.” Amaris said quickly, as she protectively wrapped her arms around him. “I will protect you.”

Soleil gritted her teeth, a little frustrated at the turn of events. The boy seemed completely unphased by her request, and seemed completely content to remain in Amaris’ arms.

“We will meet again.” She told them both, as she took a step back. “I promise you!”

A bright flash of light hit their eyes, blinding them, and then she was gone. Amaris pulled herself away from Mike and stepped forward. The glass from the window already was flying back into place. Each individual piece fit itself back into place like a puzzle, and once every piece found its place a strange, magical glow encased it completely, and suddenly the window looked completely untouched.

Amaris turned back around to face Mike as the table that Soleil had cut in two similarly repaired itself. “She was something, wasn’t she?” She asked conversationally, as the table settled back to where it had been sitting, as if nothing had ever happened. “She has grown a lot over the past few years…”

“You know her?”

“Yes.” Amaris said quietly, as she brushed her hair with her fingers. “Her family has been hunting me for centuries. They haven’t

succeeded yet, but there have been a handful of close calls." She shot him a small, almost bashful smile. "They are old friends."

"But what is she doing here?" Mike asked. "Weren't you hiding from these people?"

"She must have tracked me down somehow." Amaris murmured. "But across the Atlantic?" She looked somewhat troubled. "I'm not sure how… it seems so sudden to me."

"The Brides of Dracula found you."

"Well, they're not working together." Amaris elaborated. "So I find it strange that the Brides of Dracula and Hunter's Guild would find me so soon…. The Brides of Dracula must have left a trail behind, which they followed, only to find me."

She gave Mike a look. "Those people do not care that I have no association with the Brides of Dracula." She said. "To them I am just another vampire."

…

Although they had met the Hunter in person, Amaris still did not feel comfortable coming back to school. So Mike once again found himself all alone during school hours. His friends, although polite as ever, seemed to go ever more distant with each passing day. Mike could not bring himself to be around them, or care about what was going on in their lives. He had begun eating by himself at lunch as of late, and that was what he was doing today. His thoughts, as usual as of late, were on Amaris, and the Hunter. Just when and how would she strike next? What devious machination could a woman trained form birth to hunt vampires come up with to destroy them?

"Excuse me."

Mike looked up, and immediately balked. Standing there above him, with a tray of food, stood a young blonde girl. She eyed him expectantly.

"You-"

“I did not introduce myself when we met last night.” She said, as she set the tray down on the table. “My name is Soleil Blade. I… am a new student here.” She tilted her head to the side as she looked at him, as if taking in everything about him. “Is it alright if I sit here?”

Mike sat numbly, unable to protest as Soleil sat without waiting for a proper answer. She ignored the food, setting it aside in favor of folding her hands in front of her on the table.

She was an extremely pretty girl. Not in the voluptuous, sultry way that Amaris was, but a pretty girl all the same. She was quite tall, probably equal to Amaris in height, but seemed to prefer her blonde hair to be kept mid length, rather than the long flowing look that Amaris preferred. Although he could not see them now, Mike had been quick to notice that her long, slender legs were quite firm and fit looking. She looked rather look a professional gymnast.

“I have chosen to seek you out.” Soleil said to him, her voice firm and professional. “ In order to interrogate you about your relationship with the Vampire Amaris Yew.”

Interrogate… he was surprised that she would come forward and use that word in this environment. She was going to get what she wanted out of him no matter what. And unlike last night, Amaris was not there to protect him.

“I understand that America has not quite adjusted to dealing with the supernatural.” Soleil said quietly. “But I would have thought that you would have known, at the very least, that associating with a Vampire would be a poor idea.”

“I knew that.” Mike told her, his voice earnest. “But Amaris….” He flushed, looking away from her quickly. “She isn’t like other girls…”

“Obviously. She is a vampire.”

“No, that’s not what I mean.” Mike told her quickly. “She… really wants to be around me. I feel like I…. really make her happy.” He paused. “She loves me.”

Soleil was giving him a considerate look. “I can tell that you mean what you say.” She said slowly, as if trying to decide how best to

phrase her next topic. “But I think you must know, first of all… Vampires cannot fall in love with humans.”

Mike opened his mouth to protest, but Soleil was not paying attention. She had reached for her plastic and leaned over towards Mike’s tray, stabbing it into a slab of meat.

“You may as well say that you are in love with this.” Soleil said grimly, as she waved it in front of his face. “Vampires are no different than people, in that regard. They view humans as little more than their prey.”

She pulled away, leaving the fork embedded into his meat as she gave him that intense look of hers. Her blue eyes, although bright and beautiful, were also hard and unforgiving. “I fear that you must have been manipulated to serve Lady Yew’s ends.” She told him “Under that assumption, I feel that I must do everything in my power to protect you from her. And help you get away from her if I must.”

She stood up, nodding at him.

“I will not force you to do anything you do not want to do.” She said. “But I want you to know that Amaris Yew is not a woman that you can trust.” She paused. “Or even a woman at all for that matter. She is an abomination, one that has killed countless innocents throughout the years.”

“That’s not tru-“

“Do you truly believe that?” Soleil asked shrewdly. “That a monster that preys on humans would never kill them?”

“Amaris is not like other girls.” Mike insisted.

“And you think that is a good thing?”

Mike stared at her. She stared back unblinking. Mike found himself pushing himself to his feet and turning away, leaving his things behind.

…

“Ahhh… so she is trying to manipulate you, I see.” Amaris said, as she sipped her tea. “Interesting.” Mike was standing some distance away from her, feeling a little uncomfortable. The thoughts of what Soleil had said to him were still heavy on his mind.

“Ahhh…” Amaris said. “My sweet love. I understand how you must feel. The Hunter’s guild is, to humankind, one of the first modern organization to truly begin to fight against the supernatural. You must believe that Soleil Blade knows what she is talking about when it comes to my history.”

She fluttered her eyes at him. “The truth is, my love, is that I have indeed killed people.” She said. “Many, many people. I could not even begin to hazard a guess at just how many women have crumped to dust after I had my way with them, or how many children I have eaten. I have done some truly terrible things.”

She sighed. “But that is what I am.” She said gloomily. “I can not stop myself from hurting humans, just as you cannot stop yourself from eating your natural prey. How many cows have had to die in order to give you every Cheeseburger you have ever had in your life?”

She looked absolutely pitiful now.

“I cannot tear myself away from feeding off humans, no matter how I may feel about them.” She said. “You may have heard stories about vampires that tried to feeding completely. It is a difficult, almost impassable barrier. One that I will never overcome until the day I die.”

She touched her chest, her long black hair falling across her face in waves. “We are evil.” She said, with a sob. “Vampires and humans both.”

Mike took a step closer to her, not sure how best to comfort her. She turned away and stepped outside the room. The door slammed behind her.

Amaris immediately lifted her head and quickly stepped to the window, her emotionless eyes staring past the glass and into the

dark night. Soleil had to be dealt with.  Although she was young and very inexperienced, she had already shown far more aggression towards her than the previous four generations of her family had. Soleil was aware that Amaris had been weakened, and was determined to put an end to her once and for all. If she managed to figure out about Mike, and what he could to do her… that could easily end in disaster. She had to be strong enough to deal with Soleil quickly.

She turned around and re-entered the room. Mike had sat down on the couch, his nose in one of her books. Without a word Amaris floated upward, above him, and then crashed back down on top of him.

"Ack!"

She pinned him down, head first, her long hair falling over him. He struggled a little as she bared her fangs, and descended on him.

"Ahhhhh!"

He writhed and struggled against her as she fed. She almost moaned in pleasure herself as his fluids ran down her throat. He… was WONDERFUL.

She had to force herself to pull away. Mike was pale and shaking. She had pushed him further than she had ever done before. She leaned forward to check on him, a little worried that he was going to die, but relaxed as his shuddering calmed. She had to restrain herself next time.

She placed a small blanket over him and read in her often unused bedroom. Spider webs and all sorts of bugs were crawling around in there. Perhaps she should clean this room too, she thought absentmindedly. She had never used the bedroom for anything during her entire stay here.

She sat in the darkness, her mind mulling over the current situation ,as she waited for Mike to recover. It was several hours later when he finally began to stir. She stood up, and walked back into the room.

“Wore you out, did I?” Amaris asked. “My apologies. Please… feel free to stay the night and rest some more.”

Mike was only too glad to do so. He passed out as Amaris hovered over him, singing soft songs and brushing his hair. When he finally fell asleep she reached for the book he had been reading and committed to finishing his work.

…

“I’m not letting that bitch get near you again.”

Amaris had followed him to school this time, but had been hovering over him far more than she ever had in the past. Every time he had stepped out into a hallway following a class, she had been right there waiting for him, shooting dark glares every which way.

“Soleil and I have a class together…”

“Then I will go int with you.” Amaris said, her voice icy. “No matter the cost.”

Mike wasn’t sure how exactly that would work, but Amaris made it seem incredibly easy. Upon striding into the room, she immediately locked eyes with the teacher and sat down, as if she had always been there. Soleil, who had already been sitting in the room, stiffened noticeably as Amaris sat down in a seat directly in front of her.

“Uh, Sasha sits there, usually.” Mike pointed out.” Amaris rolled her eyes as she leaned forward, wrapping her arms around him. He squeaked, as she pressed him into the chair directly next to hers. In another swift moment she slid her body onto his lap. She sat with her hands folded on the desk in front of her, eyes forward, as if this was a perfectly normal thing to do in class.

“Greetings class….”

Amaris did not hypnotize anyone else in the entire room. She did not need to. The Teacher addressed them as he always had, and although everyone shot them weird looks, Mike tried his best to ignore it.

"God… what a slut…"

Amaris ignored the whispers, and in fact grinded against Mike's crotch more than once in response. Mike gritted his teeth, trying not to let his thoughts stray. Soleil was sitting directly behind them. Amaris shot frequent looks at her, and once or twice Mike caught her winking.

Soleil did nothing. She watched them, tapping her pencil against the desk, considering their every move. Amaris's long, black hair fell across Mike's face, and he had to keep brushing it aside to keep his attention on the lecture.

Everyone, guys and girls alike, gave them dirty looks as they stepped out into the hall. But Amaris did not move from her spot. And if the tapping pencil behind them was any indication, neither did Soleil.

"So." Soleil said, once they were all alone in the room. "This is your game, is it Lady Yew?"

She clenched her hand, snapping the pencil in half with an audible crack. "Taking advantage of the boy's primal instincts… but to what end?"

Amaris flipped herself around, but did not leave her seat. Mike yelped in surprise as, for the first time, Amaris pressed her chest against his face. He reached his arms out and grabbed her sides, in order to prevent her falling.

"I told you last night, Hunter." Amaris said, smiling a little. "I love him." She pressed herself closer against Mike's face and her gagged. He couldn't breathe, she was so close!

"Lovers do not behave this way." Soleil noted, as she raised the pencil towards them. "You both… Surely you both have realized this." Her eyes were on the back of Mike's head. Amaris' pleasant look became a sort of twisted scowl.

"Leave my love out of this." Amaris snarled, as her hair began to billow out behind her. An evil, dark aura began to emanate from her. Soleil frowned, as she reached to her side and seemingly pulled a

large, sharp looking spear out from under her skirt and pointed it at them.

“Hm.” She said. “Your aura… it is different than last time.” She raised the spear and brandished it towards them. “You have gotten more powerful since last night.”

“You can tell that at a glance?” Amaris asked, smiling. “You really have grown, Soleil. “Your Mother would be proud.”

Soleil narrowed her eyes. “If you are trying to goad me into a mistake, it is not going to work.” She said. “I will not allow myself to be so easily led into a trap as my Mother did.”

“Not the same kind of trap, I think..” Amaris said silkily, as she ran her hands through Mike’s hair. “ But a trap all the same. Your Mother and her Mother and her Mother all said the same thing.”

She giggled. “I wonder how long your family can keep up the streak?”

Soleil brought her hand down and a small, sharp dart burst from her sleeve, whizzing through the air at Amaris at an incredible speed. She blinked, knocking the dart aside with a thought, and then laughed.

“You truly have bitten off more than you chew this time, Soleil.” Amaris said, as the dart clattered to the floor. “I-“

The door opened.

“Uh- what are you still doing here?”

The teacher blinked at them, confused at the strange scene before them.

“We will settle this later. “Amaris decided, as she slid off of Mike’s lap. “Come, my love.” Mike obediently followed her out of the room, and did not cast a glance behind, where Soleil was standing, staring at them.

“She has gotten stronger…” Soleil murmured. She stretched out her hand, and the dagger floated towards her palm. She gripped it

tightly, trying to feel for any signs of damage. As was typical for Amaris, there was nothing.

If Amaris Yew truly was regaining her powers, the world was in serious danger of another Vampire Civil War, which would send Europe reeling. If that happened the Brides of Dracula would have no choice but to defend themselves, which would likely involve several Romanian towns being sacrificed to feed their armies.

Soleil could not let that happen. She had to get to the bottom of this, no matter what. She had to kill Amaris Yew.

…

Soleil approached the house, her heart beating in her chest. She stared up at the building apprehensively. Although already quite battle hardened, she found herself dreading just what she would find inside.

"Amaris!" She cried up to the building.

She was standing by the window, staring down at her. Her long red nails tapping against her arms, in that familiar, impatient way. "O Romeo, wherefore art thou-" She cried out, suddenly, catching Soleil off guard.

Soleil bristled at the unexpected Shakespeare. "Excuse me?"

Amaris, seemingly amused by her sudden declaration, continued reciting Juliet's lines. It was an unusually gloomy and dark sounding take on the material. As Soleil approached the front door she was telling the world about how much she cared for Romeo. Soleil grimaced at the impromptu performance. Amaris, in part due to her age and in part due to her isolation from society for the past century, had become extremely eccentric in recent years.

"You know, there are very few things that humans have made that I can appreciate." Amaris said. Her voice seemed to be coming from the walls of the house itself. "The magic of Shakespeare, I believe, is how relatable and fascinating it can be. No matter your age, gender, social class, or politics, Shakespeare delivered on multiple fronts. Even for people like me."

The hallway was dark and empty. Webs filled a lot of out of the corners, but the hall itself looked relatively tidy.

"Many people find Romeo and Juliet to not be a particularly great play." Amaris' voice continued to echo all around her. "I disagree. I find Shakespeare's willingness to attack the commonly held believe that young love lasts forever fascinating."

Soleil gripped the hilt of her sword, her eyes watching the walls. Having explored many haunted castles growing up, she knew very well that a monster could leap out at her any time.

"Most love stories end when the characters realize they have feelings for each other." Amaris went on to say. "And then they just end. The implication being that they fuck a lot and everything is great. Happily Ever After, to use the most commonly used term."

Amaris paused for a moment as Soleil reached the stairs. She stopped at the foot of them, staring upwards for a moment, before slowly beginning to climb them.

"Romeo and Juliet are not like that." Amaris went on to say. "In fact, Shakespeare goes out of his way to let us know that these stupid horny teenagers made a *grave* mistake." She chuckled at her own joke. "Romeo and Juliet is far more realistic than most other stories. Like all couples, they fall apart and die. They were never going to be together forever, as they so foolishly believed when they met at that party. Their affair was short, it was quick, and it was brutal… and Romeo didn't even get to fuck her."

Soleil filtered out Amaris' ramble as she reached the top of the stairs.

"You see, Romeo's plight hits home even harder today." Amaris went on. "Any young man can relate to his problems, I'm sure-"

Soleil threw her sword through the window, shattering it. Amaris fell silent as the sword fell back into her hand.

"I did not come here to be lectured on the classics." Soleil said quietly. A light breeze flowed through the window, causing her yellow hair to blow backward slightly. "I came here to kill you."

“You are nowhere near as fun as your Grandmother.” Amaris commented. “She was more than willing to discuss these things with me-“

“I am not my Gran.” Soleil said sharply. “Now face me.”

“As you wish.”

Soleil jumped as a door at the end of the hallway swung open. The sound of running water hit her ears. “I am taking a shower.” The voice told her. “Please wait.”

Soleil, narrowed her eyes as she stared at the ajar door. The sound of running water could be heard inside. She raised her sword and crept up on the door, prepared for any nasty surprises.

The bathroom was surprisingly clean and well kempt, compared to the state of the rest of the house. The floors were relatively spotless, and the mirror cabinet seemed relatively clear. The shower, as she had suspected, was running. And there was a blurry figure she could make out behind the curtain.

Soleil raised her blade, wondering just what Amaris would try to pull, as she brought it down onto the curtain. It tore into pieces, shredding with a sharp rip. Soleil had already raised the blade again, intent on stabbing, but paused when the figure’s scream hit her ears.

It was not Amaris, but the boy. He was pressed against the wall of the shower, staring at her intently. He was unclothed, and seemed so rattled by her sudden appearance that he did not even bother to cover himself.

“Where is Amaris?” Soleil demanded, ignoring his fright . She jolted as a long, pale hand stroked her cheek from behind.

“Oh, Soleil…” Amaris purred, as she leaned in closer to her, stroking her cheek and hair. “You looked everywhere in the house except right behind you.”

Soleil stepped forward, trying to get some distance between them. Amaris let her step into the shower and whirl around, weapon at the

ready. Mike was staring at the two of them in horror.

“Soleil, Soleil.” Amaris tsked. “You’ll get my shower dirty!”

With those words the shower head snapped off, and suddenly a scalding hot stream of water slammed straight into her face. She screamed, cursing her own idiocy as she flailed about. Mike too, was hit by the blast, and cried out in pain.

She couldn’t just leave him. She had to consider his needs on top of her own.

“Ha!” She stomped her foot downward.

The floor underneath them gave way. The shower, by some unforeseen force, crashed through the floor into the room below. Amaris stared down at them as Soleil grabbed Mike’s hand and pushed him towards the door.

“Have fun you two!” Amaris called after them. “Be back before nine!”

Soleil did not allow Mike to turn around to look back at her. She led him back into the hall and back into the sunny street. She slowed to a stop once they hit the concrete.

“She will not dare follow us out here.” Soleil said. “She is considerably weaker in broad daylight.” Mike pulled himself away from her, rubbing his arm. He looked completely out of sorts. As Soleil had suspected, he seemed distant and unaware of his surroundings and just what he was doing in them. Most boys would be upset at being completely naked in the middle of a bright street like this, but Mike was not. This was a clear symptom of having been deeply hypnotized.

Soleil brought her fingers up to his face and snapped them, hoping that it would do the trick. Mike stared blankly at her. He was registering the things around him, at least. But it did not seem as if he was able to completely snap out of it. She needed to get him to safety, immediately.

She grabbed his arm again and began tugging him down the sidewalk. The apartment she had acquired would have to do… She could only hope that no one would ask too many questions.

"Where- are you taking me…"

He was trying to pull away from her. Somewhat weakly, but it was a deliberate effort all the same. Soleil had no choice. She turned around and smacked the hilt of her blade against his head. He crumbled to the ground at her feed, completely unconscious.

…

Mike fluttered his eyes, staring upward at a bright light hanging right above his head.

"Ahh…" Mike grimaced a little, closing his eyes again as a damp towel was pressed against his head. The blurry figure above him pressed the towel against his neck, and he started. It was a bit more painful than he would have thought.

"Those are your vampire bite wounds." Soleil said, as she pressed them again. Mike again winced in pain. It wasn't unbearable, but it was quite a bit more pain than he was used to. "One of the reasons Vampires traditionally killed their victims was that bites were quite distinct. They are always on the same spot, on the lower half of the neck, and are quite painful when pressed."

As if to emphasize her point she pressed the towel against it again, and Mike winced.

"In modern times most Vampires have taken to attempting to hide what they are." Soleil said quietly. "They target people in places that have no hope of rooting out and destroying them, and try all sorts of tricks to hide what they truly are. Amaris Yew is no different. She has chosen to live among humans, and seems to prey off of humans who will willingly give her tribute." Her eyes flashed. "You."

Mike sat completely still.

"I do not blame you for being taken in." Soleil said. "Many of my own ancestors have been bewitched by Lady Yew's incredible

charms. It takes a strong, resilient mind to even hope of resisting her. I doubt there is a civilian alive who could have stopped her from taking them, if she so chose."

Mike opened his mouth and a slight gurgle came out. A sliver of drool slipped down his mouth and cheek. Soleil quickly leaned in and gently dabbed at it.

"I understand that this must be hard for you." Soleil murmured. "The modern world did not believe in the supernatural until just recently, and you must have no one you can rely on to help you in this situation."

She paused, the towel dangling just over his face.

"I want you to know that you can rely on me." Soleil said. "I will do everything in my power to protect you from Amaris Yew."

She turned away from him and slowly raised a phone to her face. It was plain, older model.

"I know better than to try and take you away from her." Soleil told him. "You will simply view me as a kidnapper, and long to return to her side. I have no desire to force you to make a decision. But I am here to support you, regardless."

She set the phone on his lap. "Give me your number." She said bluntly. "And we will… hang out sometime." She sounded stiff and robotic, as if she had never actually said these words in her life before.

Mike tried finding the strength to speak. He shifted his tongue in his mouth, trying to ease up his throat. "Amaris wouldn't like that."

Soleil glared at him. "Amaris Yew dislikes most things." She said sharply. "If you need me for anything, anything at all…. Please let me know."

She gripped his hand. He flinched in pain. Her grip was like a vice. She was incredibly strong. "I will do anything to protect you from Amaris Yew. You merely need to call my name and I shall fly by your side."

Chapter 6

*Strange reports have surfaced in recent weeks regarding sightings of a strange, unidentified creature. Said to resemble a giant insect, the beast reportedly has a long forked tail, an oval shaped head, and is quite ferocious-*"

"She gave you her number?" Amaris asked, wild eyed and angry looking as the radio prattled in the background. "If you ever call her, I'll kill you."

"Relax." Mike told her, grinning a little. "She's crazy anyway."

Amaris considered his words carefully, and after a moment, nodded. "She is indeed." She said. "You have no idea just how crazy, my love."

He had immediately told Amaris what had happened the instant he stepped back into her apartment the next day. She had taken it about as well as he had expected.

"She is trouble." Amaris insisted. "You must not speak to her." Her eyes narrowed. "She is trying to kill me, Mike. You must not heed her words."

"I know, I know." Mike told her. "I trust you."

Amaris smile widely at him as she wrapped her arms around his neck. "How wonderful." She purred. "It is so comforting to me that you will not run off with the first blonde bitch that wants to take you away from me."

…

*There are no signs that this is anything more than a hoax, but the recent rash of sightings truly are something to behold."*

Soleil stared at the radio thoughtfully as she sharpened her sword. A large pile of swords, lances, axes, knives, and other weapons lay in front of her. The creature that had been described did not match the description of any monster she had ever heard of. That was not in and of itself unusual (It was really common for Merpeople to be mistaken for other water demons due to Disney movies

misrepresenting them, for example) but being in a new country, one that was not as well versed in the supernatural as her homeland was disconcerting. It was very possible that it was something very, very nasty that she simply would not be prepared to deal with.

Well, one step at a time. Soleil thought to herself as her eyes fell on the completely blank report to the Hunter's Guild. She could mention the creature to them in her report and see if they could identify it. For now she had to focus her attention on Amaris Yew.

Her family had been after Lady Yew for over four hundred years. Following a number of attempted assassinations on French nobility by foreign Vampires, the King of France enlisted two vampire hunters,  to deal with the problem. The Hunters, German Born Abraham Blade and French born Adelina Bellerose, had a deep rooted distrust and dislike of each other. Working on exposing the machinations of Amaris Yew among the French court did nothing to stop their rivalry and dislike of the other's methods. They were notorious for having heated arguments within hearing distance of the king. Within a year they were married and welcomed their daughter Odette into the world. Although they never did learn to respect each other's skills as vampire hunters, it was said they were surprisingly attentive and devoted parents. Odette, as she aged, turned out to be a prodigious Vampire Hunter. At thirteen her powers were already immense, and she was well renowned for her intelligence and gentle nature.

Odette Blade went on to marry a musketeer and retired from Vampire Hunting very young in order to focus on raising a family. Their son, Eloi, grew to find himself disgusted with his Mother's decision. He infamously proclaimed women should never become Vampire Hunters unless they desired other women. He swore off his Mother' surname, took on his Grandfather's, and took after her Mother's enemy, Amaris Yew. Although Odette tried her hardest to reach out to Eloi for the rest of her life, she sadly died before they could reconcile. Her husband, far less forgiving of Eloi than she, refused to acknowledge him or any of his descendants as his heir.

Eloi had several children. He pursued Amaris Yew relentlessly for decades, siring children from women of all sorts of backgrounds. Many of his children were not aware who their father was. Eloi's unsavory actions, coupled with Amaris Yew's trademark tendency to treat the humans living in her territory extraordinarily well, led to the Blade family name being tarnished. And without a proper instructor, his children, although greater in number, did not have the same sort of success hunting Vampires as Odette or Abraham had. Many did not even know of their family legacy. In fact, one of Soleil's direct ancestors ended up working for Amaris Yew as a maid, completely ignorant of what she was getting herself into.

Amaris Yew was famous for having ordinary people serve her and her estate, and legally owning her own property in accordance with human laws, as opposed to simply taking what she wanted by force. This tactic was seen as ridiculous among creatures like her. At least until it became apparent that the people Amaris Yew had supported and cared for throughout generations would willingly fight and die in order to protect her from those who wished her harm. It was said that Dracula himself was inspired by Amaris Yew to go through the motions of legally buying a home in England order to accomplish his goals.

Because of this, it was not unusual for Lacey, an orphan peasant girl who had no idea who were parents were, to be brought onboard the Castle's staff alongside six other lovely young ladies, all excited at the prospect of serving such a respected and beloved Spanish aristocrat. At first Lacey found herself walking on air at her good fortune, but over time slowly began to become aware that something was wrong. Occasionally some members of the staff would disappear outright, and no one would speak of as to why. Curious, but frightened, Lacey began trying to piece together the events in question, and soon began to realize just how much of a monster Amaris Yew really was. The shock of figuring this out led her to flee the Castle, but her warnings to the local law enforcement went unheeded. And it was not long until Amaris' hounds bore down upon her. She would have been killed right then and there if she had

not been  saved by a passerby Doctor, who happened to be quite a shot with his musket. It was love at first sight, although the Doctor did not believe her claims. But as the years passed and they began to have children of their own Lacey began to realize that they could do things that other children could not do. Upon consulting with her husband, they began to become interested in uncovering her own ancestry. Against all odds, she found her Mother, living in poverty in a small village in Spain, who in turn pointed them on the path to find her Father… Eloi Blade.

He had been dead for over a decade when Lacey finally tracked him down, but as she stood over her grave she was approached by her half brother. The encounter, although brief, inspired her to reach out to as many members of their family as she could. Although she did not die particularly wealthy, she singlehandedly managed to unite the splintered family. Three of her children, along with four of their cousins, rallied their powers together to become the Seven Swords of the Sun, one of the most successful Vampire Hunting groups in history. Although the group individually were not as powerful as Eloi or Odetta, their cooperation and ferocity led them to many successes, particularly against many of Amaris Yew's higher ranking soldiers. Although Amaris Yew lived to see them rise and fall, she did not come out completely unscathed. Many of her more faithful servants had fallen to their blades over the years, and each member of the Seven Swords of the Sun left behind children to carry on the legacy. This was their Golden Age… each generation came closer to slaying Amaris Yew than the last.

And then, in the late nineteenth century, Count Dracula was killed, leaving his Brides to rule in his stead. Although initially optimistic about wiping out Vampire influence for good, Soleil's great-great-great grandfather Ezekiel grew old watching the situation spiral out of control. Vampires from all over the world were flooding into England in hopes of claiming Dracula's estate for themselves. Being caught in between a War between vampire clans led to the Blades not being able to utilize their traditional methods. Progress slowed to a crawl as Vampires set their armies against each other. They fought

throughout both world wars, and when the war ended in 1956 Amaris Yew was a shell of her former self. She had gambled everything in hopes of becoming the most powerful vampire in Europe and lost. Amaris was simply not a worthy opponent anymore. The Blades, for the longest time, did not pursue her, focusing instead on their new enemy, the Brides of Dracula. They joined forces with the Hunter's Guild, the European Monster Hunting organization established after the fall of Dracula and leant their services to protecting the world from supernatural threats.

As the Brides of Dracula grew in power, it became apparent that they were exceedingly eccentric, but in a way that benefitted humanity overall. Under their rule nearly all male vampires were hunted down and killed. Although a small few remained, they were far more scarce in the modern age than they had been in the past.

In response to this, all of the Blades who became Vampires Hunters in the twentieth Century and beyond were women. Tradition dictated that Vampire Hunters pursue Vampires of the same sex. Her Great-Grandmother, Elaine, her grandmother Solana, and her Mother Iliana all believed that it was a mistake to allow Amaris Yew to escape and potentially regain her powers, and Soleil had chosen to follow in their footsteps.

It seems that they had been right. Against all odds, Amaris seemed to have recovered a fraction of her powers. If Soleil allowed this to continue, Amaris would take back her castle in Spain, and surely go raise an army onto Castle Dracula in Romania to fight the Brides of Dracula. If she did that, it was certain that the other demon lords of the world would seek to expand their territory, and if THAT happened, the world would erupt into another World War.

The phone on her desk began to vibrate a little and her eyes fell on it as it began to blare Ride of the Valkyries. She let it ring for a couple of seconds as she slowly organized her notes, and then picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

She turned to the radio and slowly dialed it down. She nodded. “Yes, I did hear something about that. I have no idea.”

She stood up and turned away from her desk, bouncing on her heels. “But you know something, don’t you?”

Her face tightened as the situation was explained to her. “Area… 51…?” She repeated. “The American…?”

She paused as her informant went into more detail.

“Yes, I agree. It needs to be put down.” Soleil said. “The Guild will need to-“

She stopped mid-sentence.”

“I?” She asked, a little reluctantly. “I have important matters to take care of. I have found Amaris Yew and intend to-“

She gripped the phone tighter as the person on the other end interrupted her. “No, you do not understand.” She said quickly. “Amaris Yew is-“

Her grip on the phone got even tighter. Her face was turning a little red. “Yes, I will try to the best of ability. But Amaris Yew-“

Click. They had hung up. Soleil slammed the phone on the table and walked off in a huff. That report could not wait after all, it seemed. The Guild did not understand that the situation with Amaris Yew had changed. She would finish and send out the report tonight, and then run her errand for them.

…

“A monster approaches.”

Mike looked up at Amaris. “What?” He asked.

“The Brides of Dracula have decided to send another Monster after me.” Amaris told him. “I can sense its approach from many miles away.” She closed her eyes and took in a deep, relaxed breath. “It is killing everything that crosses its path.”

She paused.

“But I do not know what it is.” She admitted. “That is not in and of itself unusual… the Brides are well aware that I do not do as well against enemies that I know nothing of. But something about this aura… It seems otherworldly.”

She fell silent, considering her options.

“Mike…” She said slowly, choosing her words carefully. “I think it is best that I meet with whatever this thing is. The only enemy I truly fear is the one that I do not know.”

Mike flinched. “What?” He asked, sounding a little worried. “Amaris, what-“

“You do not need to worry about me.” Amaris told him quickly. “But I want you to be prepared. I may not be able to control my urges if I come back severely injured. I need you.”

Mike looked very nervous at her statement, but Amaris had already stood up and strode the room. She stopped at the door, her raven black hair falling across her back.

“Mike…” She did not turn around as she addressed him. “If I do not return, and you worry for your safety… please seek out Soleil Blade. She will be more than willing to help you. Please take care of yourself.”

She stepped through the door and it slammed shut behind her.

…

Amaris stepped through the dark, silent woods, enjoying the haunting atmosphere. It was very much unlike the small towns and cities she had been living in in for the past several years, and she found herself nostalgic for the forests back home. But she could sense that something was very wrong. There were no sounds, no bugs or animals. It was completely still except for the trees. It was an unnatural, still silence that only came about when everything in the area feared for its life.

It was unnerving. Amaris thought, as she tried to puzzle out the situation. The only thing she could think of that could cause a

reaction like this in mortals were utter abominations.

"Hello?" Amaris called out, feigning a high pitched, childish like falsetto. "I-is anyone there?" She bit her lip, her eyes darting around the forest. "I… think I'm lost!"

There was no answer. Amaris was not surprised, but she kept up the act anyway. She stumbled around like an ordinary goth college girl who had gotten lost in a nearby forest, but her attention was on her surroundings. Nothing seemed to be moving.

"God, I could really use a dick to suck right now." Amaris complained, as she ran her fingers down her throat, trying to decide what her next move should be. She was reluctant to reveal herself as a vampire before she saw what she was up against. The element of surprise was always something she tried to utilize as often as the situation allowed.

She feigned tripping over a root and stumbled, catching herself as she hit the ground. She cursed, as an ordinary girl would, as she pushed herself upward, moaning in pain.

"Oooooh…" She murmured. "I'm so… hungry…"

She licked her lips, her mind drifting to Mike, as it always did when she had to think about food, as she glanced around the surrounding area. There was nothing here. Her senses were far sharper than an ordinary person's. She should have found whatever was causing this unnatural silence a long time ago.

Was it avoiding her? Or… perhaps stalking her?

She turned around spontaneously. "Hello?" She cried out, into the trees. "Is someone there?" She stared into the forest, her eyes wide and frightened. She tried to find something, anything, that seemed out of place. But all she saw was the branches of the trees, swaying slightly in the wind.

She sniffed the air and turned around.

"I'm really not supposed to speak to strangers." She said, as if addressing someone in front of her. "But we've met before…" She

fluttered her eyes and swayed her hips back and forth. And then she began to sing in a soft, surprisingly sweet tone. “I know you; I have walked with you once upon a dream…”

She stopped, as if waiting for a response in the distance. She sighed. “Prince Charming sure is taking his sweet goddamned time.” She complained. “Where is my ride home?”

There was no response to her outburst. Nothing made a sound or approached her. She seemed to be completely alone. But she did not feel placated about that in the least. She closed her eyes and tried, once more, to feel the creature’s approaching aura again.

It was around here, and very close, but she could not quite pinpoint where. She opened her eyes again, fluttering them, trying to figure out another way to lure out her enemy. It seemed that it was not falling for her tricks.

She spread her arms outward and powerful bursts of fire spurted from her hands. The trail of fire shot through the air, setting fire to many of the leaves and branches it touched. Sparks floated down towards her from above as the flames dispersed, just as suddenly as they had come.

“I hope that you will not make yourself my enemy… whoever you are.” Amaris said quietly. “I do not enjoy fighting.”

She paused, listening to the surroundings around her. Not a thing was moving. But something was amiss. The thing had become agitated. Startled by her sudden attack, no doubt.

“You do not want to know the true extent of my power.” Amaris said, brushing her hair backward. “I-“

She looked upward, and her eyes, which were usually an alluring black, suddenly shifted into bright red narrow slits. There, hanging onto the side of a nearby tree like an overgrown lizard, was a creature she could barely even describe. Its body was long and scaly. Its tail was whip like and barbed. Its head was unusually wide and domed. Its claws dug into the bark with incredible force.

It darted down towards her, in that lizard like fashion, and Amaris did not hesitate. Powerful lines of flames burst from her body and dived downward at the creature, in hopes of burning it alive. But it did not even react to the incoming heat. It leapt forward, bursting through the flames with seemingly no effort, and darted towards her on the ground on all fours.

So it had been more surprised by the attack then anything. Amaris thought. If Fire didn't hurt it, she would have to try something else.

She floated backwards, up closer to the trees above, to stare at her enemy from above, sizing up its appearance. It did not even turn its head to look at her. It immediately bent its legs and leapt up towards her, its claws outstretched. She darted downwards, in hopes of catching it unawares, but a sharp, barbed tail lashed at her, stabbing at her stomach. She jolted backward, baring her teeth as the blade narrowly came short. She raised her hands and another intense burst of fire came from her hands. The beast slammed into a tree from the force of the blast. It immediately whirled around and scaled the tree at incredible speed.

Amaris lowered her hand as the thing turned its head back towards her. It darted at her from above, and she nimbly swerved out of the way. It tried stabbing at her again, but once more she avoided it. This time she tried gripping the thing's tail as it passed by, but she winced in pain as her hands wrapped around it. The entire length of the tail was covered in prickly, tiny little spikes. She pulled away, little trails of blood running down her hand. She was already beginning to feel a little light headed… vampires did not take losing blood very well.

The tail stabbed forward again, and this time impaled her completely through the stomach. Amaris cried out in horror as the thing popped straight through her stomach and out of her lower back. She lashed out, blindly striking the thing in the face with her fist. It went tumbling through the air, its tail sliding out of her stomach. Amaris quickly darted away, further into the trees, clutching at her waist. An inky black substance oozed out of her.

That would have killed an ordinary woman. Amaris touched the open wound and winced, her vision growing foggy. Blood… she was losing way too much blood. She needed to recover, and quickly.

She had no choice but to retreat. She floated upward a little, and her entire body transformed into Mist as she raced away.

…

He felt as if he were floating on nothing at all. He had no form, no purpose, no reason to exist. The only thing that mattered was the woman standing right in front of him. Amaris Yew was standing before him, more beautiful than ever.

"Mike… be prepared…"

Her voice was an odd, hoarse whisper.

"I come…"

Mike shifted about in bed, still a little half asleep. He lay there for a while, his thoughts still on Amaris. He had dreamt of her often, even before they had started their relationship. But somehow this felt different. It felt more urgent to him, somehow. Something was wrong.

He stared up at the ceiling, wondering just what this feeling of dread welling up within him was.

"Miiiiiiiike."

He flinched at the hoarse voice hit his ears.

"Miiike."

He shuddered at the sound and shifted in his bed. It was coming from just outside his window.

"I need you…."

The voice, although raspy and harsh, was one that he recognized. "Amaris?"

"My love…."

Mike got out of bed and stepped to the window. Without hesitation he unclasped the window and pulled it open. There, standing before him, was an Amaris shaped figure in the shadows.

"Amaris?" He asked warily, as he reached out his hand to her. "What-"

The figure raised its head, and its long black hair fell back, exposing her face. Mike screamed and jumped backward, away from the thing standing just outside his window.

It was indeed unmistakably Amaris Yew. But her face had become sallowed and sunken in. Wrinkles covered every inch of her face. She resembled an extraordinarily ancient and scarred tree.

"I need you…"

Mike crawled backward as Amaris slowly bent her head, and stepped forward through the window. She recoiled as her head slammed into the window frame, and stiffly slid through, her frame rod straight. Her two feet thudded onto the floor. She glowered down at him with sunken, black eyes and took one step forward.

"Miiike…"

He almost screamed. She so haunting, so creepy, so unlike herself that he could not help but be repulsed by her.

"I… want to suck your-"

Mike was already shaking his head furiously before she could even finish her sentence. She grimaced, as if in deep pain, as she took another step forward.

She fell forward, flat on her face, and jolted her head up to look at him. Mike flinched in fear as she slowly grabbed at his leg and pulled herself forward, crawling up his body, inch by inch, until she reached his neck.

She breathed words inaudible to him as she brandished her teeth to him. For the very first time, Mike felt genuinely threatened by her, and tried vainly to push her away. But to no avail.

It was the most painful feeding he had ever endured. He screamed as she dug her teeth into him. Blood rushed down her throat faster than either of them could handle.

"Ooooohhh…" Amaris moaned, as she tightened her grip on him. Already the wounds on her stomach, hands, and face were healing, and much of her beauty was returning to her face. "You… are wonderful-"

Mike could hardly hear her words. He could feel himself slipping into oblivion.

"That's enough!" A gunshot rang out.

Amaris hissed like an animal as she whirled around to the window. Soleil Blade was standing there, looking incredibly fearsome with a handgun in her hand. She was pointing it straight at them, her expression grim. Mike had not felt the impact from the bullet. She must have fired a warning shot.

"Ah, if it isn't our little girlfriend." Amaris cackled, clutching Mike closer. "Have you come to join us, Blade?" She sounded different than she normally did. She sounded older, more depraved. More psychotic and far more terrible.

"Let him go, Vampire." Soleil told her. "Or I will put an end to your eternal existence." She stepped closer to them, weapon raised. Amaris laughed. It was a sinister, otherworldly sound. Mike could not recall her ever laughing like that before, but now that he had… he hoped that he would never hear it again.

"Let him go?" She repeated. "I doubt he would enjoy that very much." She stroked his face lovingly. "And I doubt that you would stop hunting me, even if I was foolish enough to let him get away from me."

She leaned in and planted a kiss on his cheek. Mike felt his cheek burn up as her bright red lips contacted his skin. Soleil adjusted the gun, still pointing it straight at them. She clearly wanted to shoot her, but was holding back. Although her expression was firm, her eyes flickered over to Mike, considering his position and condition.

“Amaris…” Soleil said, her voice slow and deliberate. “What has put you in this condition?” Amaris tilted her head to the side. Soleil hardly reacted as she caught sight of the extremely deep and ancient looking scars on the right side of her face that had not quite healed.

“I do not know.” Amaris admitted. “it was unlike anything I have ever seen before.”

“Would you like to know what the Brides of Dracula have sent after you?”

Amaris stepped closer to her, staring deep into her eyes. “I would.”

“Let the boy go.” Soleil said. Her voice was polite, yet firm. Amaris raised her hand and rotated it around.

“Please leave us.”

Mike slowly got to his feet and stared in between the two of them.

“You… aren’t going to fight, are you?” He asked cautiously. “I-“

“No.” Amaris assured him. “Please go.” Mike gave them a small nod, still looking somewhat concerned, as he slowly turned and stepped outside of the room. The door slowly slid shut behind him. The two women stared at each other. A minute passed before Amaris spoke.

“I did tell him we weren’t going to fight.” She said. “Please don’t make me break my promise.”

“I would never dream of it.” Soleil said quickly. Amaris imagined that she had been expecting her to attack the instant the door was closed. Amaris smiled and waved her hand.

Soleil lay a hand on her sword as the chair sitting in the corner of the room lurched forward. It slid past with, scraping against the floor. Amaris smiled as it came to a stop in front of her, and turned itself around, presenting itself to her.

She lay down on it sideways, her long legs hanging over the arm of the chair. She cast a suggestive look at Solei.

“Pray, take a seat.”

Soleil lowered her hand. “Thank you, but no.” She said. “I have no intention of being your guest.”

Amaris lazily raised her hand to her face and stared at the back of her hand, as if she had never seen it before. “Oh?” She asked. “Then why did you come and visit me?”

“Because I have received word of just what it was that gave you those injuries.”

Amaris stopped mid-motion. She sat in place, unnaturally still. The legs that had been bouncing against the arm of the chair had stopped completely, dangling in mid-swing.

“You are very lucky to have escaped with your life, Amaris Yew.” Soleil said to her. “Because nothing else in this world ever has.”

“…Oh?”

“It is a very long story.”

“I have lived a very long life.” Amaris told her, as she snuggled deeper into the cushion of her chair. “I enjoy long stories.”

Soleil nodded, her face expressionless. “Tell me, Amaris Yew… where were you and what were you doing in the 1950’s?”

Amaris faked a yawn and sprawled against the chair. “The 50’s?” She asked, already feeling a little disappointed. “The worst decade of my existence.” She paused. “Or at least, since I was a child.” She looked down for a moment not quite meeting Soleil’s eye, before perking back up. “But why do you ask?”

“The 50’s were an interesting time.” Soleil said. “I’m curious as to whether or not you are even aware of what transpired that decade.”

“The Brides of Dracula spent most of that decade annihilating anyone who had ever pledged loyalty to me.” Amaris recalled. “And I was in hiding all throughout the decade.” She fluttered her eyelashes at Soleil. “Until your grandmother found and rooted me out, that is.”

“The incidents I am referring to have nothing to do with the Brides.” Soleil told her. Amaris frowned, brushing her hair back with her finger.

“There were no other major struggles in the 50’s.” She said slowly. “At least not that I am aware of.”

Soleil smiled. “The incident I am referring to never quite escalated into a struggle. For a period of time in the late forties and early to mid fifties, our Planet Earth was beset by alien invaders.”

“Ahh.” Amaris said, nodding knowingly. “The invaders.”

“So you have heard of them.”

“I am aware of them.” Amaris clarified. “I knew that they were flying about in the upper atmosphere… but I never had the pleasure of dealing with them personally.” She smiled. It was a radiant, beautiful thing to see. “Although I have always deeply desired to know more about our guests.”

Soleil gave her a small nod. “I see.” She said. “Please allow me to enlighten you.”

“Although many visitors have been spotted in our solar system in recent years, very few have come anywhere near our planet. No one is quite sure why-“

“Perhaps they are following the Prime Directive.” Amaris said lazily. Soleil did not even acknowledge her remark, and continued with her explanation without pause.

“A small number of ships have been spotted in our atmosphere over the years.” Soleil explained. “And of those few most quickly re-entered the atmosphere. However, the U.S. government had a stroke of fantastic luck. An alien spacecraft appeared right above a military facility equipped with anti-air ballistics. The quick actions of a young, trigger happy cadet led to the United States seizing control of a spacecraft… and also managed to capture its pilot.”

“They captured-?” Soleil relished the surprise on Amaris’ face. It was said that she was hardly taken aback by anything.

“Correct.” Soleil said. “For a brief period of thirty days the United States had an extra-terrestrial in its custody.”

“So you are saying that it escaped after the month was over?”

“No.” Soleil said, again surprising her. “The creature expired at the end of the month. To this day the causes are uncertain, although they suspected it was due to a lack of proper nutrition and our atmosphere being toxic to it.”

Amaris narrowed her eyes.

“What does any of this have to do with the creature I just fought?”

“It was the same creature.”

“The same creature that died?” Amaris asked incredulously.

Soleil twisted her mouth into a smile. “So says the vampire.”

Amaris did not look impressed at the jape. Soleil quickly explained.

“The scientists made much progress while the subject was alive, but unfortunately after it became deceased their work came to a screeching halt. The people working on the project began to get old and die off. The project became a mere curiosity and subject of a large manner of conspiracy theories. The United States Government eventually began to employ people who grew up reading these theories, who desired more than anything to study the body. Despite the advances in technology, it was very difficult for the researchers to study how the beast lived without a proper living sample. Eventually a very sketchy procedure was proposed to address this issue..”

She paused.

“They exposed the remains of the creature to the man made zombification chemical Zom-B.”

Amaris stared at her. “No they did not.” She said sharply. “No one would be that fucking stupid.” She narrowed her eyes. They looked animalistic and fierce. “Besides the body would have decayed by then…”

“It was kept in cold storage for research purposes for several decades.” Soleil explained. “The body did not decay at all in the past sixty years. The government spared no expense to keep it in the best condition possible. I’m told it was a simple procedure. They

took a syringe and injected it into the body. It re-animated completely within eight hours, but in another four it escaped… killing everything that crossed its path."

"Zom-B is infectious." Amaris noted quickly. "But it can't survive outside a host."

"Thankfully." Soleil said. "Once the beast is killed, the virus should die along with it. It should not be able to spread." She shot Amaris a dark look. "However, it is undead, and therefore-"

"Extremely difficult to make all dead to begin with." Amaris finished, flipping her hair backward. "So that is why none of my attacks seem to do much… I have gotten too used to fighting living and breathing creatures." She smiled. "Usually all of us undead can solve all of our problems over tea, but I suspect this won't be a possibility this time."

"No." Soleil said quietly. "This must end violently, I'm afraid. We cannot allow such a creature to live."

"We?" Amaris purred, as she stepped closer to Soleil. Although clearly wary, Soleil did not back away as Amaris pressed herself uncomfortably close to her face.

"Yes." Soleil acknowledged. "I would like your assistance with this matter."

Amaris chuckled. "Assistance?" She repeated, feigning shock. "A partnership? Your family surprises me all the time… what would you Mother say if she knew you wanted to be by my side?"

"I am sure she would understand, given the circumstances." Soleil answered, without a moment's hesitation. Amaris rolled her eyes and turned away from her. She clutched her arm in her opposite hand, as if she were thinking deeply about her options.

"You truly are desperate." Amaris said. "To approach me with such an offer."

"If you could not defeat the beast, I have no hope of doing so." Soleil said. "But if the two of us work together-"

"All three of us." Amaris said. Her voice was quiet, but firm.

The door to the room opened suddenly, and in stepped Mike. His expression was still blank and unfocused. He had been very deeply hypnotized. He was completely entranced by Amaris Yew, and had been for quite some time.

"I would have been killed out there tonight if I had not regained a fraction of my former strength." Amaris said. "If I had been at the height of my powers, I would have easily been able to stomp that invader back into the 50's serial it crawled out of."

She beckoned her finger towards Mike, who stepped towards her. Soleil, instinctively drew her blade.

"If you wish to allow a dangerous creature roam around free," Amaris said, her voice smooth as silk, as Mike reached her. She reached out and touched his face and stroked it lovingly. "You may stop my feeding. But if not-"

Soleil paused. She did not lower the sword, but she did not raise it any further, either.

"There is no telling just how much damage an undead alien can cause to the ecosystem." Amaris went on. "The creature, from what I observed, seems to kill indiscriminately, with no purpose. A true monster."

She smiled at Mike and raised her lips up to his.

"Unlike…. Me…"

Soleil watched as the two passionately kissed. Soleil wrapped her hands around the back of Mike's head, pressing him closely against her. Her long, flowing black hair fell across them both, like a blanket protecting them from the outside world.

"I cannot allow you to do that." Soleil warned, as Amaris' mouth slowly moved down, closer to Mike's neck. Soleil's hand was on her weapon, poised.

"If you wish for me to assist you… you will need to learn to tolerate the necessities of my existence." Amaris told her. "I need his blood to regain my strength."

“So you can one day destroy all of your enemies.”

Amaris smiled. “Is that not exactly what you want?”

Soleil did not answer. Amaris trailed her hand along Mike’s neck, longing to sink her teeth back into him. But she needed to restrain herself. Soleil was not wrong. The beast would continue to pursue her, killing all in its wake until someone put it out of its misery. Soleil could not allow it to continue killing, and Amaris could not allow it to succeed in killing her.

Soleil took a step forward, pointing the gun directly at her. “You will take what you need, and nothing more.”

“Some would say that those are wise words.” Amaris said, as she leaned down over Mike. “But others would not know when enough is enough.”

Soleil pressed her finger against the trigger as Amaris’ teeth met Mike’s skin. He let out a low, sensual moan as Amaris drank. The scratches and wounds that had not quite healed the first time began to fade away, giving way to smooth, flawless pale white skin.

“That is enough.”

Amaris sat up, a blotch of red smeared over her mouth. She stared at Soleil and licked her lips, as a pale and shivering Mike curled up into a ball at her side. Amaris was practically glowing. Soleil could not tear her eyes away from her.

Soleil took a small step forward, slowly lowering the gun, before remembering herself and stopping in her tracks. Amaris’ eyes were so wide and inviting…

She raised the gun again and fired. Amaris did not blink as the bullet sped past her and slammed into the wall behind them.

“Have you had enough?” Soleil asked. Amaris raised her fingers to her lips and slowly brushed her index finger across them, layering a large amount of blood onto her finger. She raised it to her lips and opened wide. She closed her eyes as she suckled down on it. She closed her eyes in pure bliss.

Several moments passed before Amaris lowered the finger from her mouth, sighing discontentedly. “He cannot give me enough.” She said, sounding unusually glum as she stroked Mike’s neck, her fingers tracing along her bite marks. “I always find myself wanting more…”

Soleil took a deep breath, calming her rattled nerves, as she lowered the gun, placing it back into its holster. “The boy…”

“He’s your elder you know.” Amaris told her. “By several months, in fact.” Soleil bristled at her impudence, but continued questioning her.

“You said that you need his blood to recover.” Soleil said. “Why is that?”

Amaris cast her eyes downward.

“He’s… special…” She murmured. “Something in his blood… it makes me feel alive. More powerful than I have in years.”

She fell silent, as if she had said too much, and looked away from her. She looked almost embarrassed at what she had just said. Soleil found herself rather surprised at that… she had studied documents profiling Amaris Yew for years, and every person who had ever documented her regarded her as a particularly confident specimen, one who did not think twice about her actions, thoughts, words, or opinions. Soleil recalled a certain passage that had stuck out to her as a child.

*“She does not hesitate: She shows no mercy. Her beauty is unparalleled, as is her cruelty.”*

“Something in his blood” Soleil inquired. “How do you mean?”

“I do not mean to mince words, or exaggerate.” Amaris murmured. “But it is as I say. In the past few weeks I have regained a large portion of the power I have lost over the past several years. Because I met him.”

“You have been feeding on him, then?”

“Twice a week.” Amaris affirmed. Soleil narrowed her eyes.

“That often?” Generally vampires preyed once a week, traditionally on Saturdays.

“I do not take everything he has to offer me.” Amaris said. “I allow him to recover and then…” She let out a longing sigh, and stated down at Mike’s still form hungrily. “But perhaps I have said too much…”

Soleil privately agreed. She was already trying to puzzle out the situation in her head. The boy had been manipulated so that Amaris would have easy access to hid blood, which revitalized her several times more than ordinary people could have.

“I have a long history of cooperation with your family, Blade.” Amaris said, surprising Soleil at the sudden change of topic. “Although we are enemies and likely always will be…” She let out a wide smile, before her expression became demure again. “I have no qualms about joining forces with you. Especially since my life is in danger.”

She raised her arms wide, and held them out to Soleil. Soleil stared at her blankly. Amaris stared at her without blinking.

“What is it?” Soleil asked cautiously.

“Are you not aware of your own family tradition?” Amaris asked.

“… Excuse me?”

“To show that we are willing to work together.” Amaris clarified. “We need to give each other a hug.”

Soleil narrowed her eyes. “I do not believe that for one second.”

“Solana came up with it.”

Soleil raised the gun again, an angry expression her face. “And she died quite young, as I recall.”

Amaris laughed, lowering her arms. “Oh, suit yourself.” She said. “I don’t trust you either, Soleil… You would have tried to stake me on the spot.”

“Perhaps that would be for the best.”

“Perhaps not.” Amaris shrugged. “Who knows what this creature will do once I am out of the picture?”

…

The alliance between bemused Mike.

Amaris was unwilling to let Mike out of her sight, but Soleil refused to allow them alone together. It was becoming an extremely common point of discussion how Soleil Blade was always hovering around the two of them, glaring daggers at them both.

“What’d you do?” Alexa asked him curiously. Being a particularly enthusiastic participator in the girls’ soccer, gymnastics, and tennis teams she had immediately taken a shine to Soleil. The two had played a set of tennis and Alexa had been destroyed without winning a single game. Alexa, being an extremely talented player in her own right, felt that Soleil could easily take their high school team to state and beyond and had been bugging her to join the team. Soleil had politely refused, but Alexa would not quit.

“Nothing” Mike said defensively, as Amaris flipped the pages of her book absentmindedly. Alexa didn’t look convinced, and neither did anyone else. Those around him were beginning to suspect that something was up with Mike and the ‘new girls’ as they were beginning to be known as. No story that Mike heard was close to accurate… but he would have been amazed if any story had.

“The truth is stranger than fiction.” Soleil murmured. “That is… an American saying, yes? I believe it was a quote from Mark Twain?”

“I’m not sure.” Mike admitted. “Soleil, how are you holding up?”

“Holding-“ She paused, as if trying to figure out what he meant. “Yes, I am fine.” She said. “It is very kind of you to ask.”

Mike smiled at her. “It’s for the best, right?” He said. “We need to work together to stop that thing.”

“Amaris and I need to stop that thing.” Soleil corrected him. “You can stay at home and play on your Xbox Live.”

Mark opened his mouth to argue, but then shut it again. His mouth felt very dry. The thought of him actually going up against the creature made him fell ill inside.

"What is it?" Soleil asked him. "You look… very shitty."

Mike almost laughed. Soleil looked at him reproachfully.

"I am trying to fit in here, thank you very much!" She snapped. Mike gave her a surprised look, and she backed off, looking somewhat embarrassed.

"My apologies." She said quickly. "I did not mean to startle you."

Soleil was a very odd sort, Mike was beginning to feel. Although very pretty in that exotic sort of way, she had a somewhat awkward personality… at least during her day life, while she wasn't out hunting vampires. Despite that, however, she had already won over most of his classmates. She was far more approachable than Amaris had been, and far more reasonable about her oddities.

"Soleil."

The three of them were standing in the school library. Amaris had not wanted to go home right away that day, and Soleil had invited herself to hang out after school with them. The atmosphere was a little tense.

"It approaches." Amaris declared. "We will have no choice but to battle within civilization."

Soleil gritted her teeth, looking somewhat frustrated. Mike was concerned.

"What's wrong with that?" He asked.

"She is concerned about the potential collateral damage." Amaris told him, before Soleil could speak. "It is completely possible that this battle may result in a zombie outbreak. Your President may see fit to sterilize the city."

Mike balked. "S-sterilize?" He squeaked. "Wha-"

“Most likely they’ll drop a strategic missile straight into the heart of the town.” Soleil said, her voice grim. Amaris smiled at her. “In hopes of eliminating all traces of the creature. They may also send in a Strike Team or perhaps call for Alethea, but I’m told that the President is concerned about a potential national disaster and may act rashly.”

“But dropping a missile would kill us all!”

Amaris prodded him in the head with her finger. “It would kill you two.” She sniffed. “But I like to think a little bit of shrapnel and fire would not even scratch me.”

“Yes.” Soleil said quietly, answering Mike’s question. “But it will happen if we do not get this situation under control.” She looked towards Amaris. “How close is it?”

“A couple of miles.” Amaris said lazily. “We can confront it now, if you like…”

She ran her hand down Mike’s back. “I want to eat before I go, however…”

Soleil glowered at her. “Not in public.” She said, after a brief moment’s hesitation. “Let us go to your home and prepare.”

Soleil walked them home, walking a little too closely to them. Mike found himself annoyed by her eyes constantly flickering in between them, as if she expected something to happen. but Amaris did not seem to mind. In fact she often turned to look at Soleil, patting her own hair with a smile on her face.

When the three arrived at Amaris’ home they wasted no time. Soleil again stood by and watched as Amaris tore into Mike. By the time she was finished he was ragged and shaking on the floor.

“How horrible…”

“You can help me make him comfortable, if you like.”

Soleil did so. She helped Amaris carry him to her bedroom, and the two set him gently on the bed. Once that was done Soleil leaned in

and looked closer at him to evaluate his health. He seemed like he was well within the range of recovery.

Amaris lay a hand on Soleil's neck, causing her to jump.

"Perhaps I should have you too." Amaris purred, as she ran her fingers down Soleil's hair. Soleil closed her eyes. The motion was surprisingly tender and felt good.

Soleil raised her hand and swatted Amaris' arm away. "I'll kill you if you sneak up behind me again." She said. "Are we clear?"

Amaris smiled. "Crystal."

Once again she looked positively radiant. Vampires always were at their peak performance immediately after feeding. There would be no better time for them to tackle the alien creature than right then, at this moment.

"So long, my love." Amaris murmured, as she leaned down over Mike's still body and gave him a kiss. "Soleil wants to take me on an adventure. But I'll be back soon, I promise."

Amaris stood up and stepped to the doorway, where Soleil stood silently, glowering at her. "Jealous, sweetie?" Amaris asked.

Soleil did not answer. She stepped back and pointed her head to the door. "You lead." She said simply. "You can sense the creature, can you not?"

"I can." Amaris acknowledged. "It has an unusual aura…" She raised her head high as she stepped out into the street. The sun had not quite set yet. It was still early evening and the dying throes of the sun cast gorgeous colors across the street.

"Ah, the sun is so beautiful." Amaris said cheerfully. "Let us hope that we live to see it again."

The two stepped down the street. They were a strange pair, Soleil thought. Amaris' dark, almost gothic appearance contrasted heavily with her pleasant, every day look. They looked complete opposites.

The passerby must have thought so to, because lots of people stopped and gestured towards them. Soleil ignored the attention, as

she always did, but Amaris seemed to be enjoying it.

"Don't you love children, Soleil?" She gushed, as she waved at a toddler who had been staring at them.

"I was a child once." Soleil responded, a little coldly. Amaris was not being sincere. It had been well documented among her family that Amaris Yew had a tendency to put on a façade of normalcy for occasions when she was living among humans. Although vampires generally did not quite understand human behaviors and mannerisms, they were more than capable of imitating them to lure in prey.

"So was I." Amaris said. Her smile faded a little. "It… ah, wasn't pretty." She laughed. Soleil did not question her statement.

Amaris Yew had been born a vampire. The exact cause was uncertain, supposedly even by Amaris Yew herself, although it was commonly thought that her Mother had been attacked by a vampire during her pregnancy. The historians in the family could not pinpoint the exact year she was born, or even whether or not she was even Spanish as she had always claimed, but it was clear that she had indeed been born a vampire. Vampires who were turned had clear marks on their necks that resembled bite marks. Many of Soleil's ancestors had gotten close enough to confirm that she did not have them.

Having been born in the Dark Ages, Amaris must have suffered greatly as a child. Most Birther Vampires were killed straight out of the womb. To the people of that time period it was the best thing to do with babies that tried to tear their own mothers apart from the inside. It was speculated that Amaris' Mother was alone when she gave birth, as that was the most common cause for a baby like Amaris to grow into puberty.

Birther Vampires grew as normal humans did, but required blood for sustenance and had an aversion to sunlight. Amaris probably had grown up preying on local children after nightfall.

"Amaris."

Amaris stopped to look at her. “Yes?”

Soleil opened her mouth to ask her a question about her childhood, but found herself losing her nerve. This was not the time for that. “How much longer?”

“Here.”

They came to a stop at a street corner on the edge of town. Behind them cars and people were milling about, going about their everyday business. Before them lay the wide open road. A gas station lay to their right, and a restaurant was right across the street.

“Here?” Soleil repeated. “Are you sure?”

Amaris stepped forward, onto the road, her eyes on the trees further down the road. “Let us not dally.” She said. “You do not want that thing entering this place.”

Soleil obliged her. She stepped forward after her, and pulled out a large broadsword from the enchanted pocket under her skirt. Amaris turned to look at her as she heaved the thing over her head and placed it on her shoulder. It was huge, bigger than she was, but she carried it around easily, with a single hand.

“Didn’t your Mother ever tell you that size doesn’t matter?” Amaris teased. A large, black shadow leapt from a nearby tree onto the ground before them. Soleil stiffened.

Amaris turned to face it, her eyes glinting dangerously. “Well hello there.” She said, as she stepped forward into the street. “Wonderful to see you again.”

Soleil readied herself as the beast raised itself upward to its full height. Its shell like skin was a pure, dark black and covered its entire body in way that greatly resembled armor. However it bended and flexed with its limbs comfortably. Soleil could tell by the way it moved that it had been a quick, lithe creature in life. As a zombie it had slowed down considerably and seemed to act on pure instinct rather than the keen intelligence its kind had been known for.

Amaris raised her hand to her eyes, pressing her index finger against her nose. “Act, don’t think.” She said. “You can do that, can’t you?”

Soleil raised the weapon, staring at their enemy warily. It shuffled towards them, and they could make out strange, scratching noises. Soleil suspected it was moaning in its living death.

And then it began scuttling towards them, on all fours. Its back hunched over and its head lowered to the ground, its long barbed tail hung over its body much like a scorpion.

“Stay back.” Amaris said, as she pushed open her cape dramatically, causing it to flap out behind her. “I’ll protect you.”

Soleil ignored her. She stepped in front of her, weapon at the ready, as she coolly eyed the advancing beast. Amaris tutted disapprovingly as Soleil brought the blade downward in a crushing blow.

The blade was especially large and heavy, and coupled with Soleil’s unnatural strength led it to be an incredible force. The beast cried out as the blade penetrated its skull, splitting it in two. Blood spurted outward towards them.

“No!” Amaris said quickly.

Soleil flinched as a powerful gust of wind hit her from behind. The drops of blood that had been coming towards her face suddenly were pushed back, onto the concrete.

Soleil watched blankly as the blood fell onto the street. Smoke began to protrude from the spot, and little holes were soon burning into the asphalt.

“The blood is acidic.” Amaris told her grimly. “Forgive me… I did not think to warn you.”

Soleil accepted the apology without even considering whether or not she was being genuine. She jerked the blade out of her enemy and stared at its staggering body. It was not moving towards them anymore, but it was not for lack of trying. It twitched and shook before falling to the ground in a heap. Smoke began to protrude from all around it.

“This is going to be a mess to clean up.” Soleil noted, as she stared at it. “I hope it can decompose naturally-“

Before she could finish speaking it darted forward again, on heads and knees. A large trail of blood followed behind it, and Soleil found herself coughing at the smell of the smoke raising up from it.

Amaris stepped forward, raising an arm in front of her protectively.”

“Excuse me, milady.”

Fire burst separating them. The beast on one side, the unlikely alliance on the other. Amaris pushed Soleil backwards, and she obliged, although she did not lower her guard.

“It did not die?” She asked. “But that was a head blow, was it not?”

“Zombie infections effect different creatures in different ways.” Amaris murmured. “Being not of this world, this creature may not possess a brain.” She flipped her hair back with her hair. “Not only is out of this world… it is out of its mind!”

“What do you suggest we do?” Soleil asked, as the wall of fire began to die down. From the other side of the flames they could make out a glinting black shape.

“Keep hitting it until it dies for good.” Amaris said cheerfully. “Just like a video game.”

She took another step forward, brandishing her arms outward again. “Allow me to demonstrate just how much more powerful I have become since you faced me last.”

The wall of flame had not even died out completely before the beast lunged at them again, the giant split in its skull still protruding a fierce trickle of acidic blood. Amaris stood confidently in front of it approached.

“Aren’t we popular, Soleil?” Amaris asked, as the thing came within a couple of feet of them. She brought her leg upward and lashed out with a stilettoed heel.

The blow struck the thing in the chest, and more blood began to spill out onto the grass. Amaris grimaced as she pulled away, her

shoe smoking.

"Perhaps I shall take this off."

Soleil brought her on blade again, with even greater force than before, and this time the blow ran down the middle. Soleil raised her blade, watching as the two halves of the monster fell apart on the street.

"Good show." Amaris applauded. "I could kiss you for that."

Soleil raised the blade again, staring at it. She had not noticed the first time, but the blood of the monster had severely eroded her blade. She looked at it forlornly, knowing that it was already far beyond repair.

"You look like your dog just died." Amaris told her. "It's just a sword."

Soleil shot a glare at her, toying with the idea of taking the remains and stabbing her right then and there, but before she could even come to a decision the body at their feet twitched.

Amaris and Soleil darted their heads back to the remains of the creature on the ground. The two halves of the thing were, despite the severity of the damage inflicted on them, still jittering about like a pair of dying worms.

"Unbelievable." Soleil hissed. "It can function like that?"

"We are dealing with an alien creature." Amaris reminded her, as the two halves of the creature slowly pressed themselves back together. "Its nervous system is likely different than that of a persons…"

The two watched as the two halves pressed themselves back together and became one right before their eyes. The beast staggered upright, as if it had never been injured to begin with. Soleil quickly tossed aside the now useless claymore and drew another weapon- an axe.

"And zombies, if they are not killed, can reattach dismembered body parts." Soleil recalled, as the thing continued to advance towards them. She took a step back, sword at the ready, but Amaris again decided to step forward.

“If times were not lean, I would keep you as a pet.” She said to it. “As it stands, however…”

A towering burst of flame burst from the ground at its feet. Soleil, even from a distance, could feel the heat and intensity of the flame. The beast let out another otherworldly screech as the flames burned into it.

The barbed tail came down onto Amaris’ head, and she evaded it, her eyes glinting dangerously. The flame flickered a little, and the beast jumped at her.

“Get away from her you-“

Soleil swung the blade again, catching the beast in the shoulder area. Being a much more lightly armored part of the body, the sword cut straight through it. However, the thing twisted slightly towards her at that moment. The force of that movement sent the newly severed arm flying straight at Soleil’s face.

“Argh!”

Soleil could not bring the blade back in time to defend herself: The claw wrapped around her face in a powerful, vice like grip. She screamed in pain as she dropped the ax on the ground. The hilt of the weapon slammed into her foot, causing a throbbing pain to well up inside of it.

Soleil reached for her face, and desperately tried to pull the arm off of her face. The harder she pulled, however, the tighter its grip became.

The one armed monster advanced towards Amaris. She grimaced, her usual alluring features morphing into something almost ghastly.

“Need a hand?”

She thrust her fist out towards the thing, and caught it square on the head. The force of the blow sent it tumbling to the ground. But it was not even injured by the blow. It hit the ground and immediately began crawling towards them.

“Argh!”

Soleil threw the arm on the ground, a disgusted look on her rather torn up face. Amaris quickly raised her heel and stomped on it. It struggled vainly under her heel as the Alien reached out for her shin with its other arm. It grabbed hold of it, and Amaris let out a cry as the barbed tail came for her head-

"Yaaaaah!"

Soleil brought the axe straight down, over her head, and onto the back of the tail, cutting it in two. The beast itself was not quite split in half this time. The blade stopped about halfway through. Soleil pulled away quickly, trying to avoid the blood spill, leaving the axe embedded in the things back.

Amaris, meanwhile, raised her leg and kicked her heel into the things face. Its grip on her weakened and she backed away, her shoe flopping away onto the ground to the left.

"These were brand new too!" Amaris complained, as she kicked the other shoe at the alien's head. It bounced off of it harmlessly, before falling to the road before them.

"Amaris…"

"What is it?" Amaris asked, glancing at her.

"This isn't working." Soleil hissed. "It hasn't even been slowed down."

Amaris nodded. She had never been one to mince words. "Yes, I agree." She said. "But we can't back off now. If we can't defeat this thing, no one else in this country will be able to."

"What do you suggest?"

Amaris glowered at the monster. "We are certainly powerful enough to kill it." She said thoughtfully. "It is well within our class. But-"

It lunged at her again, grasping at her ankles. She leapt backward, easily avoiding the blow.

"We need to figure out how to kill it." Soleil said. "Or at least incapacitate it and let it be the military's problem."

“How good are you are at magic?”

Soleil flushed.

“W-well….”

Amaris rolled her eyes.

“Never mind.” She snapped. “I’ll throw everything I have at it, and we’ll see if anything sticks.”

She raised her hands and a powerful green energy began to emanate from it.

“Wind.”

She slashed her hand forward, and several powerful gusts of wind slammed into their enemy. Amaris grimaced.

“No?”

She twisted her hand. “Lightning!”

From above a bright flash of light hit them, quickly followed by a small bolt. It slammed into the alien with force, but it did not seem particularly bothered.

“Tough guy, are you?” Amaris murmured. “Maybe I should try something a little… cooler?”

The thing shirked away as little snowflakes began to drift down onto them. Amaris grinned wickedly.

“It doesn’t like the COLD.” She said. “Do you have an ice cube machine up your skirt, baby?”

“No.” Soleil said stiffly. “I can manipulate water to turn it into ice, but-“

“We’re nowhere near a source of water.” Amaris finished, as he eyes flickered over the surrounding area. “Or are we…?”

She raised a hand and pointed a long finger at the restaurant. Soleil frowned.

“There could be people there!” She protested.

“I’ll scare them off.” Amaris promised her. “Just be good and fight your hardest.”

The two of them got into position as the beast advanced towards them. Soleil drew a new weapon, a large wooden hammer, and held it aloft.

“There’s no need to rush it.” Amaris told her. “Just back up slowly towards the restaurant.”

Soleil did as she was asked. The two took several quick steps back. The monster lunged after them almost drunkenly.

“May I leave you alone for a moment?” Amaris asked Soleil. “The restaurant…”

Soleil nodded, and Amaris was off like a shot. She turned and morphed into a large, sleek black panther and raced towards the restaurant.

She crashed through the window of the building and onto a table, sending glass flying all over room. The few patrons and staff that were left in the building screamed as she pounded her paw into the table and roared.

She stood there, satisfied, as the people turned and raced out of the building. She shifted back into her schoolgirl form, and kicked her legs over the side of the table. Her eyes were running all over the place.

“The kitchen, I would think.” She said absentmindedly. She stood up and walked across the room towards the large double doors and pushed them open. There was no one here, she could tell at a glance. The back door was open, the staff must have run out that way.

Amaris keen eye noted immediately that someone had left the sink running. A small pile of dishes lay in a pile next to it. She stepped closer to it and placed her hand on the plate, and picked it up. Soon after its fellow dishes began to rise up in the air, and slowly place themselves into the sink. Amaris set the final plate down gently into the hot water as a loud crashing sound came from up front.

She pushed her way out through the door and watched as Soleil Blade slammed a table bigger than she was into the alien's head. The table shattered into pieces on impact, the blow sending the creature to the floor.

"Come here, love." Amaris called, beckoning her forward.

Soleil backed up to where she was standing, handgun at the ready. Amaris walked back to the sink and raised the blue hose that had been spitting out hot water at her.

"Water!"

Soleil holstered the weapon and stepped back. She raised her arms and waved her arms back and forth, as if she were swimming. The hose fired a blast of water at them, and Soleil stabbed a fist forward, sending the hose of water towards the alien, with force.

The thing recoiled with the sheer force of the attack. Water splattered everywhere. Soleil, spun around in place, held her hands above her head, and let out a deep breath. The drops of water that surrounded them suddenly shifted into long and deadly looking icicles.

Soleil threw her arms downward, and the spikes of ice threw themselves at the creature. All of them neatly shattered upon impact.

Amaris sighed, shaking her head as she looked around the room, already trying to think of another plan. "Is that really the best you can do?" She asked, as her eyes fell on a closed door. It burst open, all on its own, revealing a walk in freezer.

Amaris flew forward, her arms raised over her head, and slammed a mighty foot into the alien's face. It went reeling, slamming into the oven behind it. Its tail shot out at her head, which she narrowly avoided with a slight tilt of her head. Amaris flew forward and grabbed the creature around its neck, and then threw it into the freezer.

The door slammed shut behind it as Amaris clapped her hands together gleefully, with a shocked looking Soleil looking onward.

“But that wouldn’t-“

“Watch.” Amaris said smoothly, as loud thumping sounds came from within the freezer. “How a real woman does magic.”

She stepped forward, almost sultrily, running her hands along the metal of a nearby table as she approached the door. The door began to thump wildly. The thing was trying to escape.

“Your mistake was to try and use cold as a weapon.” Amaris said coyly. “When all you needed to do is…”

She pressed her hands against the door and sighed contentedly, placing her hands and cheek against the surface of the cooler. Soleil watched, not entirely sure what to make of what she was seeing.

The thumping continued, this time even more violently. But Amaris did not even flinch. They stood like that for a very long time. Soleil was about to open her mouth to ask just what she was doing, when she suddenly pulled away.

“You should have tried surrounding it with cold.” Amaris told her, as she pulled the door open. An incredibly chill wind hit them.

The entire freezer had become a giant block of ice. Amaris gaped at the sight of the alien, completely frozen solid, among the typical restaurant storage.

“I present to you… your dinner.” Amaris said proudly, as Soleil stepped forward, her hand outstretched.

“Is it dead?”

“What a thing to ask of your dinner, milady.”

Soleil touched the ice, trying not to wince from the incredible burst of cold. It was unusually chilly, for this time of year and part of the world. And the ice itself was difficult to touch. She had to protect her hand with magic to shield herself from it.

“One of my talents.” Amaris said smugly. “Is that I can control the weather. At the height of my powers entire enemy armies would be rendered ineffective by this power, but as I am now chilling a freezer to absolute zero is about the best I can do.”

“Absolute Zero…” Soleil whispered. “The coldest temperature possible…” She pulled away. “Nothing could survive that.”

She darted to the left as Amaris pounced on her, her hands raised aggressively. Soleil turned and punched Amaris, square in the jaw. She went flying through the air, tumbling into a set of pots and pans against the wall and slid to the floor. Soleil leapt forward, blade drawn. She jabbed it at Amaris, but a pot slid in front of her chest, blocking it from contact. Amaris was staring at her, completely unphased.

“Better me than you, huh?” Amaris asked, conversationally, as Soleil pulled back and drew another sword. “We really do have a lot in common. You were expecting that.”

“Of course I was.” Soleil said, as she got into another stance. Amaris recognized it immediately as stance ideal for quick stabs. “How could I not be?”

Amaris floated upward, the pots and pans reorganizing around her. They set themselves back onto the rack as Amaris’ bare feet hit the floor with a gentle tap.

“I can see that Iliana has had beat it into your head I can’t be trusted.” Amaris noted, laughing a little. Soleil’s eyes narrowed.

“Leave my Mother out of this.”

“Of course, of course.” Amaris said quickly. “I wouldn’t want to-“ She paused, raising a hand to her mouth to cover it. “Step on any toes.” Soleil’s angry glare burned into her.

“How dare you-“

Amaris lowered her hand to reveal long, sharp fangs. Although a familiar sight to Soleil- she had seen vampire teeth before- she recoiled. Amaris Yew was not known to flaunt her teeth lightly.

“I am not interested in wasting my energy on you, Blade.” She said. “We have a mutual interest, you and I. The Brides of Dracula will continue to hunt me down in order to accomplish their goal to completely conquer Europe. Humanity will become enslaved under

their rule. Dracula was a far less benevolent ruler than I would have been, I can assure you."

She raised her arms and a pair of pair, black wings spread out from behind her. Soleil readied herself, expecting the worst. Amaris smiled at her. Her fangs had already receded back into normal looking teeth.

"Your family must swallow your pride, Soleil." She urged her. "We must destroy the Brides of Dracula… together."

A dark void began to surround her, and covered her completely. When it receded into nothing, she was gone.

Soleil stood there in the ruined restaurant, her hand still gripped tightly around her katana. She knew better than to take Amaris' words at face value- whether or not she would be a more benevolent ruler than the Brides of Dracula was irrelevant. Soleil would very much prefer neither of them to accomplish their goals.

But perhaps there was some wisdom there. It was the Brides who were in power after all, not Amaris. They had almost put an entire nation into a crisis in an attempt to rid themselves of one enemy. Amaris Yew, in her entire history, had never done anything like that.

The Brides were going to strike again. But next time Soleil would be ready.

Chapter 7

*Dear Diary*

*Everything is going super well so far. Everyone at my new school is super nice. I'm already becoming quite popular! I even have a new boyfriend, Mike Rose! He's really cool, and really funny. Plus he has a huge cock!*

Soleil looked up from the paper incredulously as Amaris happily scribbled away at her diary. Mike gave her a sheepish smile. Soleil grunted and looked away from them, unable to meet his eye. Mike had been nothing but cordial to her in spite of her insistence that he break up with Amaris and go into hiding.

Soleil knew better than to try and force him to change his mind, as that would do nothing but strengthen Amaris' grip over him. She had no choice but to merely try and persuade him that he was making a big mistake.

"Hey Soleil."

She turned around to find the brown haired girl from before smiling at her. Here we go again.

"Why don't you want to do sports?" Alexa asked, leaning in closer to her. Soleil pulled away, a little uncomfortable at her interest.

"They don't interest me." Soleil told her, immediately on her guard. She expected the conversation to go into an uncomfortable area, and Alexa lived up to her expectations.

"But why?" She asked, flabbergasted. "I mean… look at you." She waved her hand downwards, across Soleil's body.

"I haven't a mirror."

"That's not what I meant." Alexa huffed. "You're an incredible athlete."

Alexa would know that better than anyone. Soleil thought to herself. She was a fantastic athlete. She knew better than anyone that Soleil was capable of extraordinary things physically. But she could not learn that was a Vampire Hunter.

"I work out." Alexa had already opened her mouth to ask her to elaborate on why, but Soleil decided it was best to shut her down now. "For my future husband."

Alexa's mouth fell open in shock. "Oh." She said. "Uh, I see." She seemed somewhat taken aback.

She quickly bent her head and began scribbling on her paper. Soleil turned her head back towards Amaris, who she found was giving her a dirty look.

"Really?" Amaris asked, in an annoyed tone. "That's the best you got?"

“It is not a lie.” Soleil told her quietly. “Which is more than what I can say for your farce of a relationship.”

Immediately after she finished speaking, leaned forward, closer to Amaris, and grasped her hand in his in a protective gesture. It would have been very sweet… if it had not been Amaris Yew.

“A farce?” Amaris repeated. “Our love is no farce.” She tilted her head to the side, as if considering something, and then smiled. “Mike…” She said softly. “How would you like to invite Soleil over tonight?” Her tone was flirtatious and suggestive. Mike thankfully had the class to look embarrassed, but Soleil was a bit put off by how he seemed to smile at the idea too.

“I think not.” Soleil said quietly. “If we are to fight, I would prefer it be during the day.”

Amaris laughed. “Of course you would.” She said. “Of course you would.”

The teacher standing at the front of the room rapped the desk in front of her with a ruler. The class fell silent, although Mike did not pull himself away from Amaris’ hand. Soleil watched them, worry welling up inside of her. He meant well, she could see that. But he truly had no idea of just what he was getting himself into.

“Soleil.”

Soleil immediately leapt to her feet. “Yes ma’am?”

The class laughed. Soleil did not quiet understand why, but did not let her confusion show on her face. Amaris rolled her eyes and lay her head on Mike’s shoulder.

“Please stop glaring at the class lovebirds.”

Soleil sat back down, ignoring the laughter from the rest of the class. The teacher, Miss Esmeralda, smiled at Mike and Amaris before turning back around.

Amaris probably had her under her control too. Her powers seemed to be growing all the time… Soleil would need to act quickly, and decisively. Before things got out of control.

“Now.” Miss Esmeralda said, as she tapped the chalkboard with her ruler again. “I’m not sure what your regular teacher was covering in class this semester, so unfortunately we are going to need to improvise as we go along. As a result we will be talking about whatever until Mrs. Kingsley comes back.”

“Whatever?” Alexa asked blankly. Miss Esmeralda nodded. She lowered the ruler and picked up a piece of chalk in its place. Twirling the chalk in between her fingers, she raised it to the board.

“Yes.” Esmeralda said. “Whatever.” She drew a number of lines and turned around. She had drawn a sort of tiny, impish looking winged creature. “Today we are going to be talking about… bats!”

“Bats?” Nico, a little bespectacled Asian girl repeated, sounding puzzled. Taylor, who was sitting next to her, also seemed a little bit confused.

Amaris chuckled. “Oh this should be good.” She murmured, giving Soleil a knowing glance. Soleil ignored her. She was already tuning out. She had no need for an American Education. She was only here for the hunt.

“Bats.” Esmeralda went on to say, as she turned back to the chalkboard. “Are, contrary to popular belief, not birds-“

Amaris chuckled again. She tilted her head upward and nibbled a little at Mike’s ear. Soleil stiffened. Amaris smirked at her.

“Bats are nocturnal creatures. They hunt in the dark by way of keen, supersensitive hearing. Usually their diet consists of a number of different kinds of bugs…”

“Here I thought that bats WERE bugs.” Amaris muttered, laughing to herself. “How naïve of me.”

“There are, however, kinds of bats that hunt down and prey on mammals. These are known as vampire bats. You would know a thing about that, Amaris Yew.”

The atmosphere in the room chilled. Amaris stood up, slamming her hands on the table. Her previous mirth had disappeared entirely

from her face. In its place was that terrible, primal look.

"Who dares-"

Mike pulled away, wide eyed in shock. The aura of Amaris was overpowering to most people. Everyone in the room had completely frozen out of shock.

"I dare." Miss Esmeralda sat softly, smiling, as she raised the piece of chalk. "Do you truly not recognize me, Lady Yew?"

Amaris did not speak. She merely continued to glower at her. Esmeralda smiled, as the chalk slowly slipped out of her fingers. Instead of falling to the ground, as it should have, it raised itself back upwards and began to scratch out a vast, complex drawing from behind her.

"Surely you remember." Esmeralda cajoled. "How you cruelly took the love of my life from me."

Amaris' hair settled. Her expression became a bit more relaxed. "You're going to have to be more specific."

"It was a long, long time ago…"

The desk behind Amaris began to slide forward. She sat down on it, crossing her legs as she stared at Esmeralda. "Forgive me, but I do not recognize you." She said, after a short pause. "Could you refresh my memory, please?"

She sounded genuinely curious. Soleil felt herself breath again. All around her she could feel the class shift around uncomfortably. None of them knew just what was going on here. Soleil was beginning to feel anxious. This could quickly get nasty.

Esmeralda raised her hand. The piece of chalk that had been lying there slowly floated up on its own and headed towards the board. The class watched as the chalk etched out long, complicated lines behind her.

"Are you…." Mike hesitated. "One of the Brides?"

Esmeralda turned to him, surprised. "This one knows of the Brides?" She asked, sounding very surprised. "Your regular teacher must

know her stuff." The chalk continued to scribble behind her as she spoke. "I am, however, no vampire. I am merely a humble servant."

She reached upward towards her face and ran her finger down it. Soleil stiffened as her long finger scraped away the skin, leaving a bright green streak in its wake.

"You have come to do battle, then?" Amaris asked. She spread her arms wide, gesturing to the still sitting students. "With an audience?"

Esmeralda chuckled. "WITH the audience, actually." She said. Amaris cocked an eyebrow at the statement.

Soleil however, had heard enough. She stood up and slammed her hands on the table. "I cannot allow you to do that!" She shouted. The woman, looked her way, seemingly a little puzzled.

"Soleil…" She said slowly. "I do not think you know just what you are getting into here." Her previous, playful tone all but evaporated. She sounded dangerous. Soleil scoffed.

"It is you who is clueless, vermin." She spat. "Why don't you take off that mask or whatever it is that's covering what you really are?"

"Hm."

Esmeralda looked in between Mike and Soleil with a wary gaze. "You have gathered an interesting group of people around you, Amaris." She said softly. "One might think you were preparing to go to war." She looked at the class. "Are they all as informed?"

Amaris opened her mouth to answer, but Esmeralda clapped her hands together before she could get a word out. "I guess there's only one way to find out, isn't there?"

She spread her hands wide, and a bright green energy began to emanate from her palms. Soleil, instantly recognizing the energy as being magical in nature, prepared herself for the worst.

The class watched as the wave of energy covered the entire room like a mist. Soleil ran her eyes around the room, half expecting the

desks to grow teeth and attack them. Seconds passed. And then the mist dissipated, just as suddenly as it had come.

"Is that it?" Amaris asked, yawning. "A bunch of green mist… it wasn't poisonous. And it wasn't even thick enough to blind us. The only thing scary about it was that it was green. I give it a two out of ten."

Amaris was not wrong. Nothing had changed. Generally a spell like that would have had some kind of effect over the people it covered, but nothing seemed to have changed. Even Mike seemed confused.

Esmeralda, however, seemed completely nonplussed. She ran another finger down her cheek, causing another long line of green to appear along her skin.

"Perhaps a science lesson is in order?" She suggested, as the chalk behind her suddenly set itself down into its holster under the board. She turned around and lay her hand against the board.

It had become a vast, intricate version of a diagram that they were all familiar with. An ape walked forward, dragging its knuckles across the ground. It followed behind another ape that stood slightly straighter and carried tools. Then came another ape with less hair, and then a man like creature. At the end stood a modern man.

"Professor Darwin wants to give us a lecture on evolution." Amaris drawled. "How lovely." She ruffled up her skirt, showing off a little bit of leg, as she sat up a little straighter. "Please professor." She said, in a strangely high pitched voice. "Tell me more."

"Or you could tell us just who you are what you are doing here." Soleil interrupted. Mike was looking very nervous. She would need to get him and the others away from here. Amaris could deal with this buffoon, surely.

"All in due time." Esmeralda said cheerfully. "As I said before, I met Amaris Yew a long, long time ago. In Paris, 1410."

"1410…?"

Amaris frowned. “I was born in 1313.” She said. “I was not quite a hundred years old then. It was a long ass fucking time ago, to put it in modern terms.” She tapped her desk thoughtfully. “No wonder I don’t recall you.” She said. “That entire first century is kind of a blur to me.”

“I had lost the love of my life.” Esmeralda recalled. “And I was being dragged off to the Gallows. I briefly lost consciousness as I was being dragged up to the noose, and you appeared before me.”

“I did?” Amaris asked blankly. Esmeralda nodded.

“And you spoke to me…”

*Abandon all hope in God, for he has taken everything from you.*

Amaris frowned. “That doesn’t sound like something I would say.” She said. Soleil was quick to agree- Amaris had never been known to appear before people on Death’s Door with cryptic advice. It was simply not in her nature.

“I remember it well.” Esmeralda said. “You came to me, and when I came to… I cursed God, and decided that I would do anything to get out of there. To survive. To kill you.”

She scratched at her face again. This time a large portion of skin came off. A large green spot was on her face now.

“Because of you, I chose to forsake my humanity and sell my very soul to a Devil.”

Amaris still looked confused. “But I don’t remember any of that!” She protested.

“Although you may deny it, it is the truth.” Esmeralda said. “On that day I was hung, buried, and left for dead. But once night I had the strength to claw my way out again. I had become a witch.”

“You’re insane.” Amaris told her. “The Brides have clearly manipulated you. Please, my lady, I do not wish to fight you-”

The remaining skin on Esmeralda’s face was beginning to crack and give way. It tapered off into dust in the air, revealing the face of the woman underneath. A ghastly green hue made up the skin on her

face. Her nose was long and sharp, and her lips twisted in a cruel smile. As a human she had probably been quite beautiful, but it seemed that this particular witch had signed a contract with a particularly vile and reprehensible devil- one that did not particularly value the beauty of humans.

"Deny it all you will." Esmeralda said. "But I remember everything. And tonight I will have my revenge."

"You had six hundred years to get back at me." Amaris said coolly, as she uncrossed her legs and slid to the ground. "Something tells me that I wasn't the one that sold you out that day…" She brushed her hair back. "But nevertheless, you have been sent here by the Brides. I will humor you with a battle. One that will swiftly end in your death." She smiled. "And tonight I have even drawn a crowd!" She said. "Of my dearest friends, including two of my lovers-"

Esmeralda snapped her fingers. Amaris froze, expecting an attack. But nothing came.

"You will have no audience." Esmeralda said simply, as a bright green light began to envelop her. Amaris paused, looking around the room. Nothing stuck out at her as being particularly out of place. "Give it a couple of more minutes." Esmeralda told her hastily. The light glowed bright, so bright that Esmeralda's figure was completely obscured by it, and then it vanished. Esmeralda had gone.

"What a boring enemy." Amaris complained. "No different than the Witch Doctor, really. The Brides are running out of warriors to send against me, it seems." She sounded almost disgruntled. Once more Soleil found herself privately agreeing- The witch had not come off as particularly threatening, and if neither she nor Amaris recognized her, it was easy to assume that she was not anyone of note. Although Esmeralda claimed to be quite old, Soleil found herself doubting that she was born in the time period that she had claimed. Her manner of speech had been off putting, as it was not at all similar to the way that most creatures that old behaved.

"1410…" Amaris murmured. "That was before Dracula was even born. If she truly had a score to settle with me, she would have

come to my castle hundreds of years ago."

She froze. She sniffed the air, giving a startled look behind her. Soleil, expecting the worst, turned around. The class was still sitting in their places, completely still. Rather unnaturally still…

"What is it?" Mike asked curiously. "Amaris?"

"They are no longer human." Amaris said slowly, the wheels in her head clearly turning. "But what, I cannot-"

Nico, the little Asian girl sitting next to Taylor, suddenly opened her mouth wide and howled. Large, animalistic fangs sprouted from her face and she leapt up onto the table. Behind her a long, brown tail swayed back and forth.

Mike pulled backward, clearly a little unnerved at the display. "W-what?" he stammered. "What is-"

Soleil raised her fists, and held them out in front of her, staring at Nico darkly. "They are transforming." She breathed.

One after the other their classmates began to leap upward, onto their desks, and howl violently. Boys and girls alike seemed to be growing hair up and down their bodies, long tails that protruded out from behind them, and fierce, animalistic facial features.

"First a wolf, now a monkey." Amaris commented, as Taylor leapt upward, snarling sinisterly. "You certainly have the worst luck, my love."

"This is no laughing matter." Soleil barked, her keen eyes taking in the bulging muscles under the tightly sleeved Nico's arm. "These things are dangerous."

Nico, as if by instinct, leapt forward towards her, hands outstretched and snarling. Soleil, hesitant to use lethal force, grabbed hold of her arms and twisted, grappling her to the ground. A normal person would never have been able to overpower a creature of that size, but thankfully Soleil's exceptional strength was more than enough to restrain Nico. Not that she didn't try biting and struggling under her.

Amaris brushed her hair back, scowling. "Miss Esmeralda needs to actually read *The Origin of Species*." She complained. "Monkeys and apes are not the same thing-"

Her expression darkened as Alexa hit the ground and rushed them on all fours, fangs bared. She leapt towards Mike.

"Keep your hands off of him, you damn dirty ape!"

Amaris kicked her in the chin, sending her sprawling along the floor. Amaris stepped backward and spread her arms wide protectively in front of Mike.

"My Love, you cannot stay here. It is too dangerous-"

Mike nodded, looking exceptionally white. "Y-yeah…" He stuttered, as Nico cried out and pushed at Soleil. Soleil grimaced, but kept her grip tightly wrapped around her limbs and neck.

"We need to find a safe space for you." Amaris said. "Please follow me."

The door burst open and Amaris took Mike's hand and dragged him out of the room. Taylor came after them, but a  desk slammed itself against the wall before she could reach them. She howled in pain as the door slammed shut behind them.

"What about Soleil?" Mike asked anxiously.

"She can take care of herself." Amaris assured him. "She wants you to be safe just as much as I do."

Several doors down the hall burst open and a stream of monkeys began to fill out into the hall. They fought and howled and clawed at each other, and all of them were heading in their direction.

"Let us take the scenic route." Amaris said brightly, as she turned and tugged Mike down the opposite direction.

He broke out into a run. She did not let go of his hand as she floated upward, continuing to lead him down the hall. More doors burst open, and more of them begin to filter out. There was nothing in this hall other than lockers. Monkeys were now following them on both sides.

“There’s no end to them!” Mike moaned, looking frantically in between them. Amaris nodded. Although very calm, she very much understood the gravity of the situation… she could not protect Mike while dealing with all of these monsters.

“You’re lucky I’ve seen a lot of high school movies.”

Mike stared at her, confused, as the dial on the locker behind them began to spin wildly. It clicked, changed directions, and then after another few spins came to a stop. It burst open.

“Nerd!”

Mike yelled out in pain as Amaris slammed her palm against him, shoving him completely in the locker. It was a tight fit, but the metal around him bent outward to accommodate him. The locker slammed shut.

“Okay.” Amaris said, as she brushed her hair back again while taking in the crowd of monkeys. “Now, I think all of you owe me lunch money. So if you would be so kind as to get in a line and come at me one at a time, that would be appreciated-

They did not listen to her. She rather had the impression that they did not understand her at all. Although many of the monkeys had broken out into smaller scale fights on either end of the hall, plenty of them still made their way to for her anyway. Without Mike to worry about, however, she felt free to let loose.

Seven of them made a beeline for her. The first leapt upwards, brought its hands together, and brought them down like a hammer. Amaris telekinetically pushed the creature backwards. It screamed as it flew through the air and slammed into a computer lab window on the opposite end of the wall, shattering it to pieces.

The second and third ran towards her together, behind her. She looked over her shoulder, a bored expression on her face, as they poised to spring. This time she gave one of them a slight push to the side- enough to bump it forceful into its companion.

The two turned on each other almost immediately, fighting and clawing for dominance as Amaris focused her attention on the

remaining four.

She spread her arms wide and turned herself into a massive gorilla. She slammed her hands against the ground and roared mightily. Almost instinctively the smaller monkeys turned tail and ran- back down the hall and out of sight.

Amaris shifted  back into her human form with a smile on her face. So far everything was going about as well as she could hope. Mike was safe, Soleil was out of her hair, and Esmeralda seemed to be way out of her depth.

Now it was only a matter of finding her. Amaris thought, as she stepped down the hall lightly. She could not make out her aura or her scent, but that was not particularly unusual- it was fairly easy to mask your presence from a vampire if you had the knowledge to do so.

Amaris turned the corner and watched as a monkey leapt upward onto a printer and reached downward yanking papers by the dozen and throwing them into the air. They weren't even all that aggressive. Amaris thought to herself as she stepped past it. She did not even bother transforming herself into mist or something smaller- the monkey was too preoccupied to bother her.

It was such a strange tactic. Amaris thought to herself, as she passed by several monkeys running around wildly in a classroom. Usually monsters would be given enough intelligence to know that their purpose in life was to come after her. But these things, although certainly aggressive and violent, seemed to have no qualms with doing whatever they wanted. Esmeralda was never going to get her like this.

In fact she could probably just go home right now, suck Mike dry, and allow these things to run wild with no repercussions. And when Esmeralda showed up to confront her again, she would kill her without a second thought and that would be that.

She turned another corner. She was now near the front of the building, where she and Mike stood making out in front of everyone

coming to school in the morning. Standing in front of the door stood Soleil Blade. She was staring forlornly at the doors.

“Leaving us so soon?” Amaris purred, as she slid up to her. “I would have thought that you would stay and help those poor, innocent victims of witchcraft.”

Soleil turned to face her, looking a little stern. Amaris could tell that she knew she was coming. “We are just as much victims as they, I’m afraid.” She said. “Have you looked outside?”

Amaris cocked her head.

“Outside?” She repeated. Soleil nodded. She stepped forward and pushed open the door.

There was no outside- there was only a pitch black void that stretched out into oblivion. Amaris stared at it, not really sure what to think of it, as Soleil let her take it all in.

“I don’t think it is a good idea to leave.” Soleil confided in her, as she shut the door. “I dropped a pen over the side, and it feel into the abyss. It is probably always going to be falling.”

Amaris scoffed. “What a waste of a pen.” She sniffed. But she was troubled- she had not been expecting this. Not only that, but it had been Soleil to notice that something was wrong. She had not noticed a thing.

“Esmeralda must have incredible powers over space to do this to an entire building.” Soleil went on. “Perhaps this Witch is a threat after all.”

Amaris turned around, her back facing Soleil. “No.” She said quietly. “She is doing this because she knows she is not a threat to us.”

“What do you mean?”

“Where is Esmeralda now?”

Soleil paused. “I don’t know.” She said. “But what does that have to do with-“

“Esmeralda is trying to keep us locked up in here.” Amaris interrupted. “She must have some kind of strategy… and I suspect she is willing to keep this up for a very, very, very long time.”

Soleil narrowed her eyes. “You mean-“

“The three of us are locked in here, alone with these things.” Amaris said. “Right now we have the upper hand, but is that going to the be case a week from now? Or a month?”

Soleil did not respond.

“I suspect she is trying to starve me.” Amaris said. “She locked me into my refrigerator and made everything in it inedible.”

She whirled around and stepped towards Soleil. She pressed her hand against her neck, pushing her into the wall.

“I may have to resort to eating you.” Amaris purred.

A gun clicked. Soleil raised her hand and pressed the barrel into Amaris’ neck.

“Try it and you die.”

The girls stared at each other. Soleil pressed the gun further into Amaris’ neck, but she did not flinch.

“Do you really want to ruin this beautiful face of mine?”

“More than anything.”

Amaris laughed and turned away. “Now is not the time to be fighting amongst ourselves.” She said. “I will eat you if I absolutely must, but if you are willing to help me get out of here-“

“Agreed.” Soleil said quickly. “There must be several thousand people in this building. I must protect them.”

“We must protect them.” Amaris reminded her. “I do not want to starve.” She grinned. “And you don’t either.”

Soleil stepped past her, holstering the gun back into the bag on her thigh. Amaris noticed, amused, that it would be very easy for someone giving a wayward glance at her legs to spot it.  “This is no time for jokes.”

Amaris flipped her hair back. “It wasn’t a joke.” She said. “It was a warning.”

Soleil did not even turn around as she walked away from her. Amaris smiled to herself as she followed behind, her heels clicking along the floor.

“So what do we do first?” Amaris asked.

“Why are you asking me?”

“I want your opinion.”

They passed a couple of tussling monkeys on the ground in front of the school gymnasium. They gave them a wide berth, and they paid them no mind.

“Ideally I would want to break out of this school first, and find a way to break the curse on these people.” Soleil said. “The issue I have is that I’m not entirely sure on how to do that.”

The two of them fell silent.

“Really?” Amaris asked dubiously. “Just kill Esmeralda.”

Soleil turned to face her. “It’s that easy?” She sounded almost surprised.

“How long have you been training for this?” Amaris asked her. “Yeah, it should be that easy.”

Soleil turned back around. “Very well. I will kill Esmeralda.” She drew her gun again and checked it. Amaris rolled her eyes.

“Have you ever hunted a witch before?”

Soleil froze.

“…No.”

“Figures.” Amaris said, as she stepped in front of her. “Perhaps I should lead this dance, hmmm?”

“No.” Soleil said quickly, as she leapt forward several steps. “I can handle it.” She sounded completely confident in herself.

“I can handle it better.” Amaris teased her, as she floated quickly forward, further down the hallway. Soleil narrowed her eyes.

“Do you truly believe that?”

Amaris turned around and crossed her legs in mid-air, as if she were sitting. “I know.”

Soleil scoffed. “Enough of this.” She said shortly. “We must keep ourselves focused on the task at hand.”

She paused, staring past Amaris and into the hall. Amaris, leaned back to get a better look for herself. A deep green mist, thicker than the one they had seen previously, was slowly creeping towards them.

“… Is it the same as the one before?” Soleil asked cautiously ,as back away from it. Amaris considered it, pawing her face thoughtfully.

“I think it is the same kind of spell.” She said. “But… I think it is far more powerful.”

“Enough to overpower us, even?”

Amaris laughed. “Don’t be ridiculous.” She said. “I would never succumb to smoke and mist. You, on the other hand-“

The mist continued towards them, albeit it a rather slow pace. Soleil backed away, In a moment of inspiration she reached for her weapon sack and pulled out a war fan. She held it out in front of her, covering the lower half of her face completely as her eyes glared at the mist Amaris gave her an annoyed look.

“What, do you think you can blow it away?” She asked dubiously. “With that thing?”

“Do you have any better ideas?” Soleil asked darkly, as she brought forth another fan. She brandished this one to the side.

“Plenty.” Amaris sniffed. “But I do not want to waste energy if I do not need to do so.” She blinked longingly at Soleil. “Doing so will make me hungry. And when I get hungry…”

“Yes, yes, I’m on the menu, I’m well aware.” Soleil said dismissively, as she eyed the mist warily. The monkeys who had been playing with the door down the hall were almost enveloped by it. Amaris too noticed them, and leaned in, laying her head on Soleil’s shoulder.

“Let us see what they do.” She purred. Soleil did not react at the intimate contact. Her eyes remain steadfast towards the monkeys amusing themselves.

SLAM

CREAK

SLAM

CREAK

The monkeys jittered as they slammed and opened the door over and over again. They did not seem to notice or care that the green mist was beginning to seep in over them. The girls watched as the mist slowly covered them entirely.

Nothing happened for several seconds. Although the mist still kept creeping forward, and the girls kept backing away from it, there was no sign of the monkeys at all.

“I suppose-“

Before Amaris could finish speaking, however, a violent roar erupted from the mist. Two dark shadows leapt forward and slammed into the ground in front of them. The ground shook under the weight of the beasts.

The monkeys had grown over twice in size. Their muscles had become even larger, and the clothes that they had worn as people were beginning to rip and tear.

“Interesting.” Amaris said quietly, as her heels clicked onto the floor beneath her. “The mist makes them increasingly animalistic. Not to mention aggressive.

The things slammed their hands onto the ground and broke out into a sprint towards them. Soleil did not hesitate: she stepped backward, neatly raising her weapons in a defensive position. Amaris yawned and turned away from them.

"I'll let you handle it, darling…"

They leapt at her, powerful jaws opened wide. Soleil spun backwards, closing her fans in mid-motion, and stabbed the beasts with them. One in the forehead, the other in the stomach. One crashed down next to her, slamming its head against the floor. The other keeled over, spitting all over her face.

Soleil ignored the sticky wet feeling on her face and brought up the second fan, smacking it against the face. It slammed into the floor right next to its fellow. The first one trembled a little, as if trying to get up, but Soleil roughly stomped on its stomach, causing it to cry in pain.

"Heels would have made that even more painful." Amaris said cheerfully, as Soleil took a step back, shaking herself off. The beasts moaned in pain as they stepped away from them. Soleil thought faintly that she had lashed out without even considering that they were people. She felt a little sick to her stomach.

Amaris stepped closer to her and touched her face. "Now that just won't do." She said softly, as she leaned in to her face. "Why don't we get you cleaned up, before we do anything else?"

Soleil had already been planning to do so. But before she could tell Amaris that, she had grabbed her arm and led her back down to the bathrooms they had just passed. They entered the women's one, and Amaris pushed her gently towards the sink. Soleil, forgetting herself momentarily, nodded her thanks.

As Amaris got her a towel, Soleil turned the tap on the sink. A strange gurgling sound hit her ear, but nothing came out.

"No water?"

Soleil jumped. Amaris had come up from behind her. She had not seen her in the mirror. "No." She said, her voice grim. Amaris clicked

her tongue.

“No food, no water, surrounded by Monkeys… sooner or later you’re going to beg me to take you.”

“That is never going to happen.” Soleil said shortly, as she held her hand out. Amaris raised the towel, and ignoring her outstretched hand, reached forward and dabbed at her face.

“I think we can get the worst of it off.” Amaris said tenderly, she dabbed and patted at the skin. “But we’re going to have to make due with the smell, I’m afraid. Monkey spit doesn’t exactly make the best cologne.”

Soleil grimaced and almost pulled away at the intimate contact, but Amaris grabbed her other arm before she could move.

“Stay still.” She said. “Be a good girl.”

“I am very good.” Soleil said crossly. Amaris nodded sagely.

“Of course you are.” She said. “Which is why you are going to stay still and not move.”

Soleil felt she should protest, but she couldn’t bring herself to voice her concerns. She stood quietly there as Amaris dabbed and patted at her face.

“Well?” She asked, as she turned her around to face the mirror, placing her hands on her shoulder. “That is about as good as you are going to look tonight, I’m afraid. I hope you weren’t planning on going to a party.”

Soleil stared at her own reflection. Although she could feel Amaris’ hands on her shoulders, and see them out of the corner of her eye, there was no trace of her in the mirror at all. Soleil was completely alone.

“Now.’ Amaris said, as  she gently stroked the back of Soleil’s head. “Back to business, hmmm?”

Soleil nodded, and led the way back out into the hall. Amaris followed suit, fingering her own hair absentmindedly.

Three more monkeys had filtered into the hall while they were taking their reprieve. They seemed to be playing tag- they leapt around, howling, and pushed and shoved each other.

"Just another day of high school." Amaris said cheerfully, as she came to a stop at Soleil's side. "I wonder if any of them are fucking each other?"

Soleil ignored her and gazed around the room, thinking deeply. There was no sign of the mist. Not here or there or anywhere.

"Where could Esmeralda be hiding?"

Amaris sighed, shaking her head. "Who knows?" She asked. "We're going to have to lure her out somehow."

"Do you have any plans?"

Amaris pressed her finger against her cheek, thinking deeply. "I could have you now-"

"No."

"Then perhaps we need to think of the matter more."

Soleil tilted her head to the side, growing a tiny little bit irritated. "Perhaps if you could think of something other your appetite, you would have more of an idea of what we could-"

"I know!"

Soleil, surprised, fell silent as Amaris strode forward, towards the large double doors across from them. The monkeys ignored her- they seemed too fixated on their game. Soleil quickly darted behind her, her head bent, half expecting them to leap out and attack her. They did not.

The doors opened of their own accord and the girls slipped through. They were standing in the gymnasium.

"Well?"

Amaris turned to look at her, confused. "Well what?"

"What was your grand plan?"

Amaris turned away from her. “We need to look around some more.” She said vaguely. “Explore the place. Do some recon. Analyze our situation.”

“I could have come up with that much.” Soleil said dryly. Amaris laughed.

“Of course you could have, sweetie.” She said.

The two stepped onto hard wood floors and looked around. The vast, open room felt particularly threatening given the circumstances.

“Esmeralda…” Amaris whispered to herself. “Where are you Esmeralda…”

There was no answer. Soleil had not been expecting one, and neither, it seemed, did Amaris.

“I really do think she intends to keep us in here and starve.” Amaris complained. “Soleil, have I ever told you how much I value our relationship?”

“If she isn’t here at all, then our priority should be to break the curse on this place.” Soleil said. “We needn’t worry about killing Esmeralda if we can find a way to escape.”

The lights above them flickered, and then went completely dark.

“Oh no.” Amaris said, in the pitch blackness. “Soleil, I’m afraid of the dark.”

“No you are not.”

“Please hold me.”

“NO.”

The lights flickered back on, just as suddenly as they had went out. But they were not alone in the room anymore.

Standing before them was a gigantic behemoth of a monster gorilla, standing nearly twenty feet over them. It leered down on them with an intense gaze. Its eyes were bloodshot and wild looking.

“Is it friendly, do you think?” Amaris asked amicably, as she stepped in front of it. “Can I keep it as a pet?”

“Amaris-“

It slammed its hands onto the ground, causing the very ground around them to shake violently. The lights above them swayed violently, and one snapped off and fell.

Amaris acted quickly. She bent her head to the side and the light fell, slamming downward onto its head. It clattered to the ground, and the beast glanced at it. It seemed unable to understand where it had come from. It also did not seem to have felt the blow.

“A rather uncouth beast, are you not?” Amaris asked, as she ran her hands along her body. “Perhaps I should put you out of your misery-“

“No!”

Soleil shook her head as she stepped up next to her. “It’s probably a person!” She hissed. “We can’t kill it!”

“You cannot kill it, perhaps, but I have no such reservations-“

“Then that makes you my enemy.”

The two glared at each other.

“I thought I was your enemy already.” Amaris purred. “I had no idea that your feelings had changed.”

The beast slammed its hands against the ground again and roared. Soleil had to flinch and cover her ears, but Amaris was completely unphased. She stood tall against the force of his very voice, although her hair billowed back slightly.

“You’re such a big boy.” She purred. “But I think you should run back to Mama Esmeralda.”

“There is no need for that.”

A burst of green flame burned in between them and the face of the Witch Esmeralda glared at them from within.

“At last, the elusive witch shows herself.” Amaris said lazily, as the beast warily backed away from the flame. “We were just talking about you.”

“Yes, yes, I heard every word.” Esmeralda said. “I have been watching the three of you very carefully. The three of you evaded my powers most impressively. I congratulate those of you who are not a vampire.”

Amaris threw her hair back haughtily. “No praise for moi?”

“In spite of your allies, Amaris Yew, you have fallen completely under my spell. You have no means of escape or sustaining yourself for any significant period of time. Your only source of nourishment will wither away and die within three days, if not sooner-“

“I am well aware of that.” Amaris Yew said. “Soleil and I were just discussing what this means for us.”

“Three days will go by very quickly, Amaris Yew.” Esmeralda said, her voice dark and mysterious. “You will fall victim to my followers, and I will have my revenge-“

“Revenge for WHAT?” Amaris asked, sounding a little annoyed. “Look, girl, I don’t know who you ARE-“

“Silence!”

The lights flickered again, casting the entire room into darkness. Only the bright emerald flame of Esmeralda illuminated the room.

“You will regret taking my beloved Phoebus away from me.” Esmeralda said. “And you will suffer for all  of the ills you have inflicted upon the esteemed Brides of Dracula!”

The flames burst high, further into the air, and then just as suddenly disappeared entirely.

“What a dork.” Amaris said, shaking her head at the beast in front of them sadly. “What a LOSER.”

The animal still seemed reluctant to approach them spot where Esmeralda had been. He shirked away from them, eyes wide in fright.

And then, from above them, a familiar green fog began to descend.

"Amaris…" Soleil said slowly. The doors behind them shook violently, but did not open.

"No exit." Amaris said grimly. "And bursting through a wall is out of the question… if we ended up outside building we'd be stuck in the void!"

The fog slowly descended upon them, like a particularly sinister cloud. Soleil braced herself for the inevitable impact. The beast in front of them, however, had other plans.

Having seemingly gotten over its fright of Esmeralda's sudden appearance, it advanced towards them again, its knuckles placed firmly on the ground.

"I do not want to see what happens to it if it gets exposed to more of that stuff." Soleil said to Amaris, as she readied her sword. "It shall become even more horrifying."

Amaris laughed, placing a hand over her mouth. "So it will become more like me, then?" She inquired. "I'm sorry to say that there is only one Amaris Yew, beast."

The fog covered the lights completely and bore down closer to the beast's head. It soon enveloped It completely, obscuring it from view.

A loud shriek filled the air as a long, serpentine neck burst out from the crowd. It slammed into the ceiling with a loud crash, sending the lights swaying violently. Soleil flinched as the thing looked back down at them, grinning wickedly. The face of the ape, although it had kept the general shape and size, seemed to have changed considerably. The ordinary eyes of a mammal had given way to the animalistic, creepy stare of a reptile. A long forked tongue flitted out of the thing's mouth, and it hissed. Its neck, wild and snake like, swayed wildly back and forth.

"I commend you, Esmeralda." Amaris said, as she stared up at it. "I am not entirely sure what this is."

The mist, thankfully, seemed to be dissipating as they spoke. It seemed that Esmeralda had done precisely what she wanted to do. Soleil stared up at it, her eyes narrowed.

“A snake?” She inquired. “A dragon? No…”

“It does not matter what it is.” Amaris sniffed. “It needs to die.”

The long neck seemed to elongate as Amaris spoke. The body of the thing staggered forward, swinging its arms wildly as the head of the beast dived down towards them. Amaris, dove for the body. Soleil, at its head.

“Raaaah!”

Soleil swiped the blade sideways across the things face. It recoiled, snapping wildly, and darted towards her.

She barely managed to avoid the attack, as the beast crashed headfirst into the wall. It was fast.

The entire gym seemed to shake with the force of the beast crashing about. The head turned itself around and darted back towards her. Soleil, on the defensive, leapt backward, hand on her sword, trying her hardest to find a weak spot.

Amaris stood on the side of the beasts neck, completely nonplussed. Her position defied gravity: An ordinary person would fall to the ground. But Amaris stood tall on the beast’s neck, watching with amusement as the body slammed its firsts into the ground in front of them.

“You cannot hit what you cannot see.” She said smugly, as she raised her hand. A dark, evil energy began to surround it. “As you now know.”

She swiped her arm downward, where she was standing, and leapt away as a burst of blood shot out from the side of the beast’s neck. It roared in pain as its severed head slammed into the ground at their feet and twitched on the ground, rather like a dying fish.

“All those who stand in my way will die by my hand.” Amaris declared, as she landed neatly next to Soleil. She brushed her hair

out of her eyes almost callously. Soleil stared at her, sweat running down her face.

She had not been able to even land a hit, and yet Yew had defeated the beast, just like that. She truly was on another level…

"We can wait until after this is over to make out, Soleil." Amaris told her. "I want Mike in on this, okay?"

Before Soleil could retort, the body of the beast began to twitch. The two turned to face it, surprised, as two more heads burst forth. Amaris swore and took a step back.

"A Hydra?" She repeated, outraged. "She turned it into a Hydra?"

The two heads bobbed above them, as if trying to get their bearings. Soleil scoffed as she sheathed her sword, and in its place drew two guns.

"Did you really have to cut off its head?"

The heads darted down towards them and the girls leapt away, in opposite directions.

"Two heads are better than one!" Amaris said cheerfully, ignoring the severity of the situation. "Do you have any better ideas?"

Soleil raised her handguns and pointed them right at the body of the beast. Amaris grinned.

The heads dove towards them again. Soleil made a break for the body, her guns outstretched in front of her. She fired, one round after the other, into the body of the ape. Blood spurted out as the bullets hit their targets, but the beast did not even flinch.

"Think BIGGER!" Amaris cried out, as the heads dived down towards her. She raised her hands, grabbed hold of one, and twisted violently. The neck snapped off.

"Amaris!" Soleil snapped, as two more heads burst forward from the body. "Ignore the heads!"

"I am sorry." Amaris apologized, as the beast slammed its hands into the floor again. "But there's nothing I can do!" She raised her hand

and sliced at the other head. “You take the body!”

Soleil grimaced, trying to decide on what her best course of action would be. Considering the intensity of the situation, she did not have long. She made her decision and spread her legs wide. She reached for the sack on her leg, and pulled out a bigger weapon.

It was a large, heavy duty rocket launcher that was bigger than Soleil itself. She had to push herself off the ground in order to slide it out of her bag. It slammed into the ground with a heavy thud. Soleil spun around, landing on the ground in front of the monster, and hefted it into position.

“Cover me!”

“As you wish!”

The dark energy covered both of Amaris’ hands, and in a burst of motion she swerved in between the heads of the Hydra, sending them all tumbling to the ground. She stopped. Her hair flew behind her wildly, and her eyes had become bright red slits.

Soleil aligned the weapon onto the monster and fired. It burst forward with a loud hiss and shot forward. Amaris laughed gleefully as the object broke apart- revealing a large net.

“Rar!”

The net widened and wrapped up the monster, binding it hand and foot. Amaris, howled as she was pressed against the beasts violently thrashing neck. It bit and nicked and struggled, but it could not move.

Amaris converted herself into mist and shifted out of the net and above the monster. She floated about them for a while longer than was necessary and reshaped into an ordinary looking Amaris Yew.

“I really did think you were going to kill it.” Amaris said, her voice disappointed. “I thought I had a positive influence on you.”

“Hm.”

Soleil threw the Net Launcher at the monster. It cracked against its head causing it to cry out in pain. Amaris giggled.

“That will have to do.” She said. “It’s a start, darling.”

The beast struggled and writhed as the net tightened its grip over it. Soleil watched as the heads of the beast tried to cut the net with its teeth, and failed. The net was specifically designed for capturing extremely large opponents.

“We must end this quickly.” Soleil said to Amaris. “We almost had to kill it.”

“I wonder who it was?” Amaris asked coyly, as she pressed her finger against her chin thoughtfully as they stepped out of the gym and back into the hall. “One of your boyfriends, maybe?”

“I do not have boyfriends.” Soleil said dismissively. Amaris smiled sultrily and leaned in closer. Soleil ignored her, brushing past her and into the hall.

A number of monkeys had gotten into the hall. The trophy case had been broken open. Shards of glass lined the ground as they pawed through the case, tugging off trophies from the wall.

“Was Esmeralda a famous athlete?” Amaris asked thoughtfully, as a large golden trophy fell and smashed into the floor. “Who I preyed on the night before the biggest night of her life, costing her everything?”

“I would have known that if you had.” Soleil told her. “I have studied all of your most famous victims.” Amaris smiled winningly.

“You could be my next-“

A large, silver plague flew though the air at them. They ducked, narrowly avoiding the blow. The plague the wall and fell to the floor.

“That was rude.” Amaris said, glowering. The plague behind them shot itself forward, past them, back into the crowd of monkeys. The animal let out a squeak of surprise as the plague slammed into its forehead.

“Amaris!” Soleil said sharply, as the monkey crumbled. Amaris laughed and shook her head.

“Oops.”

The monkeys howled. They darted away from their fellow, cackling madly in fear of them, leaving their fellow completely alone. It lay on the floor, twitching. Soleil feared that it had suffered severe brain trauma.

Amaris, however, strode next to it and kneeled over it, her eyes hard and calculating.

"It will live." She announced to Soleil, who was standing dispassionately at a distance. "A loss to us misanthropes everywhere."

"It is alive?" Soleil asked, as she stepped forward. True to Amaris' word, the thing slowly rolled over, onto its belly, and tried to push itself off.

"It was just stunned." Amaris explained. She reached out a hand towards it. "Come on, little buddy. Soleil won't hurt you anymore…"

Soleil glared daggers at her as Amaris ran her hand along the back of its neck. It recoiled a little at her touch, but otherwise did not move.

"I can not feed off of it in this state." Amaris confided in Soleil. "But perhaps there is something we can use it for."

"Something else…?"

Amaris wrapped her arms protectively around it and lifted it upwards. Although it was quite large, about her size, she seemed to have no trouble carrying its weight. "Yes. Perhaps we can study it, or use it for ransom."

"Ransom?" Soleil narrowed her eyes. "I doubt Esmeralda cares much for the lives under her thumb."

"Does she really?" Amaris asked coyly, as she stroked the back of the monkey's head. "We know very little about her, after all."

"And perhaps you are desperately trying to find a way out of this mess."

Amaris paused. "All too true." She admitted. "But I must admit that I am completely baffled by all of this. Esmeralda may or may not be a

particularly powerful witch, but she sure has done a fairly decent job of isolating me in a way that will wear me down."

"If only there was a way we could find out where she is hiding…" Soleil lamented. Amaris paused, her eyes lighting up.

"Ah ha."

She chuckled darkly as she held the monkey out in front of her. Soleil instinctively stepped forward, as if to protect it. Amaris stomped her foot irritably.

"I'm not going to hurt it!"

Soleil paused, as Amaris raised the dazed monkey to her face and stared deep into its eyes. They widened and glazed over, and then the head slumped.

"I thought you said-"

"It's not hurt." Amaris said coldly, as she lay it on the ground. "I merely hypnotized it into sleep." She trailed her hand along the side of the animal's body, and then along its head. "I need to look into its dreams."

Soleil started. "It's… dreams?"

"Yeah." Amaris said quietly, humming softly, as she kneeled on the floor over it. "Although I cannot read the minds of animals or those trained to resist my powers, I can very much influence them over sleep. Animals do dream, and I do not imagine I need to do a very deep dive to find at least a hint of where Esmeralda could be."

Soleil laid down on one knee, staring at her. "How long will this take?"

"Impossible to say." Amaris said. "A couple of minutes, most likely. But I will need to focus. Please do not bother me."

Soleil nodded as Amaris raised her head high and gave a deep sigh. Soleil sat patiently as Amaris sat completely still, staring at them. The beast writhed and let out soft little whimpers and moans. Soleil almost worried that Amaris was attacking it in some way.

But then Amaris looked up at her, looking triumphant.

"Did it." She said cheerfully. "She's in the library reading Les Misérables."

Soleil stared at her. "Really?"

Amaris rolled her eyes and reached towards her, grabbing her hand. "Yes, really! Now come on!"

Soleil did not have time to react as she was dragged to her feet and led down the hallway to the library. Amaris did not look back at her as they walked. Soleil found herself a little relived at that- the sooner they could get this done and get away from each other, the better.

They came to a stop outside the large double doors. A group of monkeys were sitting in chairs in the room just outside the library proper. The doors were closed, but they could make out quiet murmurs.

"What are they doing?" Soleil hissed. Amaris, in answer, raised her hand the door opened just a crack. The noises soon became audible.

"I do believe this is the most dreadful novel I have ever read in my life." The girls gave a start, staring at each other in horror as the voice continued. "It has no plot, no direction, no passion behind it. I think the author just wanted to make easy money."

"Yes, a far cry from his earlier works." Another monkey said, sniffing. It was dressed, the girls could plainly see, in a tight twee jacket, bow tie, and large eyeglasses. "The prose is droll, and the unnecessary violence and sexual imagery is quite distasteful."

Soleil gave Amaris a dark look. "What are they doing?"

"Having a book club meeting, I think." Amaris said, puzzled, as she screwed up her eyes. "But who are they talking about…?" She seemed genuinely curious. Soleil glared at her.

"We need to get in there."

"Okay fine."

Amaris strode to the door and it burst open. Soleil flinched as Amaris strode in.

“Hi guys!” She chirped. “What were you just talking about?”

The group of monkeys all stared at her, openmouthed. No, not monkeys…. Apes. And particularly unattractive ones, at that.

“I say, is that Amaris Yew?”

“We have been expecting you!”

“Yes, it is I.” Amaris Yew said, flipping her hair back with her hand. “And I am on the hunt for the Witch Esmeralda. Have you seen her, by any chance?”

The five apes were climbing out of their seats. All of them were neatly dressed in rather darkish looking clothing that looked straight out of a second hand store from the fifties.

“What novel were you just discussing?” Amaris asked conversationally as they advanced towards her. “I am quite the bibliophile myself, and I-“

“That is no concern of yours, Amaris Yew.” The ape in the jacket said at once. “Esmeralda awaits.”

They parted ways and stood on other side of the doorway into the library proper. Amaris nodded to them as she stepped past.

“Wait-“

Soleil trotted after her, looking concerned, but the apes moved in front of the doorway again.

“You have no place in this fight, Soleil Blade.”

Soleil glared at them. “Is that so?” She asked coldly, as the apes reached into their pockets and drew weapons. Guns, knives, and one large hammer were brandished before her.

They leapt at each other and clashed.

Amaris cared little for what was happening behind her. All she cared about was what lay ahead. The bookshelves immediately ahead of her were stripped bare. Every single book had, it seemed, been

compiled into a large pile in the center of the room. At the top, sat Esmeralda on a throne made entirely of books. On either side of the thrones were two burning spikes- books that had been impaled and then set aflame.

"Are you trying to offend me?" Amaris asked, annoyed, as she stepped further into the room, trying to make out which books Esmeralda had decided to burn. Before she could make out the titles, however, the flames grew in size and power, covering them completely.

"Amaris Yew." Esmeralda said dramatically, as she stared down at Amaris from above. "You have finally arrived before me…"

"Finally?" Amaris asked, as she ran her eyes along the tower, wondering just how many books she had to use to make her tower. "It only took us about an half an hour to-"

"You have finally come before me." Esmeralda repeated herself., as if Amaris had not spoken. "You have just now taken the last few steps of your life-"

Amaris floated upward, and then bobbed herself up and down.

"Today, Amaris Yew, I will take my revenge for what you did to me all those years ago. It has been many centuries, many indeed, but not a day has gone by where I have not thought about all of the wrong you did us. Today, my love will finally be able to rest in piece-"

Amaris stared at the pile of books under her. The books burst into flame. The roaring inferno soared upward, enveloping Esmeralda completely. She screamed in pain as the red flames enveloped her completely. Amaris watched coldly as green, charred blur threw itself onto the floor of the library.

'I still do not know who you are." Amaris said, as she stared at the charred green skin of the witch Esmeralda. "And it's not a mystery that I will lose sleep over not solving."

Chapter 8

"How did you break the curse?"

Amaris toyed with the broccoli on Mike's plate with her plastic fork. "I do not know." She said. "It seems that once Esmeralda died, the curse broke and everything returned to how it should be."

"Are things usually that simple?" Mike asked skeptically. Soleil shook her head.

"Not always." She said. "We were lucky, I think. Esmeralda was careless and underestimated us."

Amaris shook her head. "No, I do not believe that is the case." She said. "I believe she simply had that much faith in herself to defeat me and live to brag about it."

"There is no way to know for sure." Soleil pointed out.

"You can say that about a lot of things." Amaris said coyly, as she leaned towards Soleil and fingered her hair. Soleil leaned away from her, her gaze hardened. Mike cast a look down at her leg, and was unsurprised to see a gun pointed at Amaris' stomach.

"Everything worked out." Mike said, trying to keep things optimistic. "Everyone seems fine."

"Yes…" Soleil said slowly, giving him a look. "Everyone does."

"What is it?"

"Mike…" She paused. "Why were you not cursed along with the others?" Mike stared at her with a surprised look on his face. He did not notice the dark, focused look that Amaris suddenly had.

"What?"

"All of the other students were transformed into monkeys." Soleil explained. "Because Esmeralda wanted to use them against Amaris Yew. Amaris and I were unaffected because our powers can be used to counteract that sort of thing, You, on other hand-"

"Enough." Amaris said, her voice cold. "Do not badger him-"

“Do you know something, Amaris?” Soleil asked. To Mike’s horror she pulled her arm upward and set the gun on the table, pointed straight at Amaris. “Anything you would like to share?”

“Not particularly.” Amaris said, her voice still ice cold. Mike felt a shiver run down her spine: Amaris was not herself. “You would do well to not ask any more questions, Soleil.”

“Guys….” Mike whispered, his voice hoarse. “People are looking…”

“Let them stare.” Soleil said quietly. “Let them be the ones to know that I blasted what is left of Amaris Yew’s heart onto the floor.”

Amaris laughed. “You talk a good game, sweetie.” She said, fluttering her eyelashes at her. “But I doubt you are able to follow through. You would miss me if I died, wouldn’t you?”

“Yew-“

Before Soleil could answer, however, a long, dark shadow descended upon them.

“What is going on here?” The booming voice of the principal rang out over them. Soleil and Amaris stared at him, nonplussed. Mike shirked away.

“Theater practice.” Amaris said immediately, gesturing to the gun. Soleil glared at her. “It’s a prop.” The principal nodded sagely and wandered away. Soleil glared at her.

“Put it away.” Amaris told her, as she crossed her legs coyly. “Before you end up doing something you regret.” Soleil glared at her before reluctantly holstering the weapon. Mike inwardly breathed a sigh of relief: whenever they were not fighting the Brides of Dracula, the girls were always at each other’s throats.

“So what are we doing tonight, love?” Amaris asked him, fluttering her eyelashes at him. Mike swallowed.

“Well, I-“

“He is going home with me.” Soleil snapped, banging her hand on the table. The whole room fell silent to stare at them again. Soleil

did not seem to notice the shocked stares. Amaris cleared her throat.

“Um, Soleil? Do you realize how that sounds?”

Soleil was becoming increasingly involved in their lives. It was hard to go anywhere without her standing some distance away, watching them. She was not particularly subtle about it, and people around them had begun pointing out how strange it was. Not that Soleil seemed to notice, or care. She went about her life as she always did: Focused entirely on her mission.

“Believe it or not, Soleil, I don’t want you to kill my girlfriend.”

“I understand how you must feel.” Soleil said, her voice grave. “She is making you feel things you have never felt before, and you are reluctant to let her go. However-“

“She’s not what you think.” Mike said shortly. Soleil stared at him, her expression stony and cold. They had several conversations just like this, practically every day. No matter how much she tried to persuade him that Amaris was not someone he should be spending so much time around, he firmly dismissed her concerns. Although he fully and completely believed Soleil’s stories about Amaris’ history as a vampire, he seemed to be under the impression she had decided to mend her ways.

Soleil knew better.

“You can join us, if you like Miss Blade.” Amaris told her, smiling willingly. “I was just telling Mike that it would be nice to have another girl around-“

Soleil glowered at her. She was about to give an angry retort, but before she could come up with something sufficiently witty enough to cow Amaris Yew loud footsteps fell down over them.

“Guys-“

Amaris turned to face the new arrival, and her expression immediately hardened. It was Taylor. Mike flinched as she stared right at him.

“You’re Mike Rose, right?” She said, speaking extremely quickly. “You dropped this-“

She reached out a hand to him. In it was a neatly folded letter. Amaris gave it a glance, clearly suspicious.

“What is it?” She asked sharply. “Who is it from?”

Taylor gave her an odd look, and then her eyes fluttered back to Mike as he reached forward and took the letter from her.

“Thanks.”

Taylor nodded, suddenly looking a little troubled, as she turned and walked away. Mike watched her go, the letter clenched in his hand. However the girls were more interested in the letter.

“What is it?” Amaris asked again. “Answer me!”

Mike held it out to her and she took it, scowling, as she peered over the address.

“Romania…?”

She tore it open, sending shredded pieces of paper fluttering down to the ground as she pulled out a small letter. Her eyes flickered over it, her eyes dark and angry.

“How dare they?”

She threw the paper to the floor and brushed her hair back. It had somehow become tangled and wild. Mike gave her a look before reaching down to pick it up.

*My dearest Yew Amaris,*

*It has been a very long time since any of us have spoken to one another. I have spoken to the others and none of us can remember the last time we had an amicable conversation together. It is regrettable to me that the woman who made me who I am today is now my enemy.*

*Your victories over us are impressive despite your current status. You have had a stroke of luck discovering new blood that can satiate you satisfactorily, but it will not last.*

*My hand is out to you. You may surrender and join our cause at any time. I have already promised you complete dominion over your castle and the area surrounding it. I have gone to great pains to preserve the estate in your absence in hopes that you will someday return to us. I very much recall how much you loved the beach.*

*I dearly hope that someday we can put aside our selfish desires for power and make peace with one another. I also hope that day will be soon.*

*With love,*

*Dracul Illona*

*P.S. Hey sweetie if you do come back can you bring your friend Mike? I'm very interested in seeing what he's made of. <3*

Mike looked up at Amaris. "Dracul-?"

"One of the Brides of Dracula." Amaris said, her voice grim. "The oldest of the three, and the only one who married Dracula when he was still a mortal man." She looked very upset. Mike reached out a hand to touch her arm, but she brushed him off, scowling.

"Illona?"

Soleil was very interested to hear that. She took the letter from Mike and read it herself, taking in all of the information.

"Mike…" She said slowly. "I believe that the Brides are threatening to take your life."

Mike blanched. "W-what?"

"Of course they are." Amaris sniffed, her nose in the air. "They have realized at this point that I recovered a significant portion of my power… they will want to take that away from me as soon as they are able." She stared at Mike, her expression hard and focused. "I will never let them take something of mine away from me again."

Mike felt his heart melt. "Amaris…" He murmured, as he leaned forward closer to her. Soleil narrowed her eyes at them.

“I am sworn to protect the innocent from vampires all over the world.” Soleil said. “You have my blade as well, Mike.”

“Thank you….” Mike whispered. He did not even pull his eyes away from Amaris. Amaris smiled, as she flicked her hair backward.

“I think Soleil is starting to grow attached to you, Mike.” She purred. Soleil’s eyes flickered towards her, but she said nothing.

The next couple of weeks went by very slowly. Mike never seemed to be alone anymore- in the scant few moments that Amaris Yew left his side, Soleil was always there in her place. The girls could not be anymore different from one another.

“Don’t worry about a thing, Mike.” Amaris reassured him. “I will unleash the forces on hell on my enemies if they take you from me.”

“Be very afraid.” Soleil cautioned him, later that same day, not half an hour later. “The Brides of Dracula are the most feared Vampires in the world, and Amaris Yew is the greatest threat to their rule. I have no doubt they truly wish you ill.”

Mike personally felt somewhere in the middle: He definitely knew that the Brides were a threat to Amaris and his relationship with her, but he had seen first hand the crazy things that Amaris and Soleil were willing to do to protect him. Them being around him so much did a lot to reassure him that everything was going to be fine.

As time went on, the feeling grew and grew, and Mike soon almost forgot about the looming threat of the Brides. Amaris made sure that each and every day was as idyllic and wonderful as possible.

“I want you Mike…” Amaris purred, as she bent down over his neck. Mike arched his neck backwards as Amaris plunged her teeth into his skin. He moaned and writhed under her as she deepened her grip on his hair.

Soleil was watching from the doorway. “I think that’s enough.” She said sharply. Amaris cast a longing glance at her as she raised her head above Mike, licking the blood off of her lips. Mike gave a disappointed groan below her.

“Enough watching, you mean?” Amaris asked suggestively, as she slid off of Mike and onto the floor. He bare feet padded along the carpet. She raised her arms widely and slid closer to her. “You are welcome to be next, you know-“

Soleil pulled out her gun and fired. The bullet slammed straight into Amaris’ head and she reeled backwards. The bullet clattered to the ground at her feet as Amaris rubbed her forehead.

“Ow.” She complained. “That STINGS.”

Soleil fired again and Amaris took another bullet to the head. Again it clattered to the floor.

“You could have just said no.” Amaris huffed, as she reached for the black coat she had set on her chair. “I am going out… look after him, will you?”

And before Soleil could even protest, Amaris had donned her cloak and pushed past her into the hall. Soleil turned and watched her leave before turning to Mike.

“Are you alright?” She asked anxiously, stepping towards him. She kneeled down by his bedside and cupped his head in her hands. She tried to keep the disgust out of her face. He seemed downright ecstatic, despite how pale and weak he looked. Despite his better qualities, Soleil had to admit that she was a little disappointed with how much he seemed to enjoy being bitten.

“Hey Soleil.” He slurred, as she ran her fingers over him. “It really isn’t that bad.” Soleil stared at him pityingly.

“You are naïve.” She said simply. “She is only using you for her own gain. You are nothing to her.”

He closed his eyes and laid still. Soleil watched him carefully. He had fallen asleep. She sighed in disappointment, shaking her head as she gently laid his head on the pillow and tried her best to make him comfortable.

She was not sure where Amaris went immediately after feeding. Some distance away, probably. Soleil had noticed that Amaris was

extremely confident after every feeding. Not without good reason, of course… she had steadily been regaining her strength since she had started feeding on Mike. She had likely gone to taunt the Brides in some fashion, or perhaps deal with a threat on her own.

Soleil was very hopeful that Amaris and the Brides would kill each other and save her the trouble, but she was not exactly optimistic. Their conflict had been at an impasse for decades. In recent years Amaris had steadily been weakened by the nonstop barrage of monsters sent to claim her head, but recently she had regained a fraction of her strength. If she became stronger-

"Mike." Soleil murmured, leaning in closer to him. "Do you know what Amaris wants, more than anything?"

He shuddered a little bit. He fluttered his eyes open at her.

"My… blood?" He asked weakly. Soleil reached forward and touched his hand.

"That is a very good guess." She acknowledged. "And you do play a very big part in her overall goals. To destroy the Brides of Dracula and conquer Europe."

She paused, watching Mike carefully. He was blinked tiredly up at her. She kept speaking.

"The Brides are terrible, but their rule has led to a lasting peace." She said. "A shift in power now could lead to a major conflict across all of Europe. In this day and age such a war would not go unnoticed by the World at large."

She bent her head downward. "If Amaris Yew is killed by the Brides, it is likely that they will gain the confidence they need to meet their other enemies in open battle. No matter who wins, the result will be the same."

She closed her eyes, trying to decide what she would say next. "Mike, I will not ask you to turn your hand on Amaris- I would not ask that of anyone. But I think you need to be aware of just who and what she is before you make any-"

A light tinkle came from the window. Soleil started, her eyes flickering upward at it. She watched it intently, wondering whether it was something innocuous or not, when another small object thudded against the glass.

She stood up and walked to the window, carefully peering through to the ground below. It was still daylight, so she could clearly see a figure standing on the road outside.

Its face was completely obscured by a motorcycle helmet. Its body was covered entirely in a thick coat that seemed to be far too big for it. A good portion of it trailed along the ground behind it. The jacket covered the entire body- Soleil could make out very little. But she could see a long, thin arm held out in front of it. It was tossing a stone up and down in its claw. A motorcycle was parked behind it.

"Stay here." Soleil commanded, as she turned for the door. "And be quiet."

Soleil left the room, headed downstairs into the hall, and opened the front door. She was relieved to see the creature had not moved from where she had seen it.

"Bonjour sir." Soleil said politely. "How may I help you?"

"Amaris Yew." The thing said. "I am here for Amaris Yew."

The voice was cold and unnerving: It was not a human voice. It had a strange, hissing quality to it. Soleil could not make out what it was under the helmet.

"She is not home." She said. "My apologies, but you will have to come back later."

"I will settle for Mike Rose." The thing said.

Soleil immediately reached to her thigh and pulled out a sword. "I am afraid I cannot allow you to do that."

The thing bent its head. The sunlight glinted against the helmet ominously as the claw reached up to touch it. It pushed it upward and off of its head.

The helmet slammed into the ground as Soleil caught the first good look at her enemy. Large, cold reptilian eyes stared back at her hungrily. A row full of vicious white teeth were bared at her. It was unmistakably a dinosaur- a velociraptor, if she was not mistaken.

"You're from Astoria… yes?" Soleil questioned, as she tightened her grip on her sword. "You have no business being on the surface."

The creature turned around, back to its motorcycle. The back of its jacket had a large, intricate logo of a bright pink velociraptor emblazoned with the legend CLEVER GIRL.

"My business is killing." The velociraptor said quietly, as its claw reached for its jacket It threw the entire thing aside in one quick motion. It hit the ground with a heavy thud. "I have every business being here."

Its entire body seemed to be covered in metal. A vast, intricate set of armor covered the thighs, chest, the neck, and back of the head. What wasn't covered in armor was covered in weapons. Its tail had a dagger bound at the tip. Its wrists were bound in thick metallic bracelets, which connected to a small protruding point that Soleil knew could fire laser beams.

"Do you really?" Soleil asked dubiously. "Who are you, exactly?"

"I am Gloria." The dinosaur answered. "Perhaps you have heard of me."

"My apologies." Soleil said. "I have not."

The animal blinked. Soleil had the impression she had surprised it. "I see." It said. "Perhaps my deeds have not quite reached the surface just yet." It raised its claw and closed its talons, one after the other. "I am the greatest killer among my people."

"I believe you." Soleil acknowledged, eyeing each one of her weapons warily. "But what do you want with Amaris Yew?" The creature blinked again.

"I want to kill her." The thing said. "Amaris Yew is a monster."

Soleil barely had time to appreciate this fact before the creature continued speaking. “She was the Vampire responsible for the Spanish to enter Astoria and lay ruin to our beautiful land. It has always been my dream to be the one to end her life.”

“You have not been sent by the Brides?” Soleil asked sharply. The creature nodded.

“I have no love for the Brides of Dracula.”

“Then we have no reason to fight.” Soleil said, as she sheathed her sword. “My name is Soleil Blade… I am a Vampire Hunter in pursuit of Amaris Yew. I too long to see her vanquished.”

“Blade?” Gloria repeated. “Yes… the name has come up in my studies.” The raptor lowered its arms in a less threatening gesture. “I apologize for accosting you. I thought you one of Amaris’ servants.”

“She has none, at the moment.” Soleil told her. Her mind drifted to Mike.“ Not one that could stand up to you, anyway.” Gloria bared her teeth at her. Soleil stiffened, almost expecting an attack, but instead the raptor turned away, laying a claw on its motorcycle.

“And Mike Rose?”

“How do you know of Mike?” Soleil asked sharply. No one outside those involved with the conflict between Amaris and the Brides should have been aware of him and what the strength he gave to Amaris.

“I have been watching the Vampire’s movements for quite some time.” The dinosaur answered. “I know of her and her relationship with the boy. I am prepared for the worst.”

It raised its claw and ran it along her arm, along the metal of her armor. It let out a screeching sound.

“The boy cannot live.” The Dinosaur intoned. “I will not allow it.” It turned back around to Soleil, who had already raised her sheathed sword towards her. “That boy has no involvement in the crimes of Amaris Yew.”

“But he is offering up his blood to her.” Gloria pointed out, her voice calm. Soleil grimaced.

“Choose your next words carefully, Astorian.” Soleil said quietly, as slowly drew the blade. “They could very easily end your life.”

The tail of the velociraptor bobbed threateningly behind her. Gloria bent her legs, her teeth bared. “I have no quarrel with you, Blade.” She said. “I will give you one chance to step aside.”

Soleil did not move. She glared at the dinosaur hatefully. Gloria stared at her for several seconds, before her gaze hardened. “Very well.” Gloria said. “I admire your resolve. Prepare thyself, Vampire Hunter.”

Gloria raised her gauntlets and the vast intricate metallic gauntlets on her wrists begin to shift about and change shape. Three small rods popped forward, straight at Soleil. Gloria raised them forward and six intense laser beams burst forward, towards Soleil and the house.

Soleil wasted no time. She waved her hand, grimacing, and a magical barrier burst between them. The lasers bounced away from her in opposite directions. Into the sky, the street, and down the road. One slammed into a tree and it instantly caught fire. The two beams that shot into the street left intense burn marks on the concrete.

Gloria barked like an animal as she leapt forward. Her long, powerful legs propelled her towards Soleil at terrifying speed. Unable to prepare a proper defense, Soleil was slashed across the chest by a mighty toe claw.

*Amazing…!*

Soleil reeled back, blood dripping down her chest, as the dinosaur lashed its head forward to bite at her. Undeterred by her own injury, she grabbed the beast by the head and twisted, sending it slamming into the ground. It yelped in pain and fired more lasers. Soleil, moving quickly, avoiding the attacks and stomped down on the creature’s head.

But before the blade could connect, the barbed tail came swinging down onto her head. Soleil caught it in midair, but the action made her lose her balance. Sensing an opening, Gloria twisted at her feet, rolling around on the floor like a dog. Soleil was thrown to the ground, and Gloria leapt to her feet.

There was no trace of the sentient Astorian now: The bloodlust of battle had made her no different than her ancestors who had dominated the planet millions of years ago. She clawed into Soleil's back viciously, tearing apart the girl's back and dress. Soleil screamed in pain and agony as Gloria ravaged her from behind. Shreds of skin and fabric seeped into the concrete.

"S—stop!"

Gloria looked up, surprised. The predatory gleam in her eyes faded to a more subdued one.

"Mike Rose?" She repeated. "What are-"

"L-let her go!"

He was standing on the stairs to the house, staring down at them in horror. Soleil clenched her fist as Gloria took him in.

"Mike… stay back…" She murmured. She had been defeated so badly that she could not even put any force behind the words. She clenched her fist even tighter and tried to push upward up. She could not even move.

*Come on…*

"Mike Rose." Gloria said quietly. "Is that correct?"

"Y-yes… that's correct."

"Excellent." Gloria said. Her clawed foot clicked against the concrete as she stepped past Soleil. Soleil grimaced, balling her hand into a fist. "I have been looking for you, Mike Rose."

"You have?"

Soleil took in a deep breath as Gloria lunged for Mike. She could not even move as Gloria pounced on him.

Mike fell backwards onto the steps, slamming his head onto the steps. He yelled in pain as Gloria leapt past him and into the house itself. She hit the wooden floor and slid a couple of feet. She had lost her balance.

"Close… the door…" Soleil moaned, waving at him to try and get his attention.

Mike did not hear her. He rolled along the steps as Gloria stepped back out. He crawled out into the street and made his way towards Soleil, his hand outstretched. Soleil grimaced, shaking her head.

"No… get away…" She whispered. She brought her leg backward, fumbling for her leg in hopes of grabbing hold some kind of weapon. She was so disoriented and weak that she could not even find the energy to pick out what she wanted to use- she would have to make do with whatever she could grab.

Gloria lunged at Mike again as Soleil procured a weapon. A wooden staff. Normally she would only use such a thing to entertain children, not fight dinosaur assassins.

"When life gives you lemons…"

Gloria's mouth was open wide. Soleil raised her arm and weakly threw the stick, in a fashion relatively similar to that of a javelin. Gloria did not have time to react as the wooden stick entered her throat.

She hit the ground, choking, as she tried to pull the stick out of her mouth with her claws. Soleil grimaced as she fumbled for another weapon. If it had been a bladed weapon, of if she had been able to put more power into it, that could easily have been a fatal blow. Gloria coughed and gagged as she spit the staff back onto the concrete and glared at them. Mike cried out and backed away, laying a protective hand on Soleil's knee. Soleil felt her heart warm a little bit at the attempt. She could not just let him die.

Gloria glared at them as Mike shifted his body over Soleil's. "She is a hundred times the warrior than you, human." She snarled, as she raised her leg.

Soleil brought out another weapon and threw it at Gloria. She dodged, hissing, as the axe flew past her head. She dove for them as Soleil tried to reach for another weapon.

"Stop!" Mike cried as the monster butted his head. He went slamming into the concrete, crying out in pain as Soleil weakly swiped a sword at Gloria. It snarled, backed away, and then dove down at Soleil. She cried out in pain as the teeth met her skin-

"Stop!"

Mike kicked out at the dinosaur. It did not even budge, but the surprise of the blow made it look towards Mike, away from Soleil.

"Raaaaaaah!"

Soleil smashed the hilt of the sword against Gloria's head. It went sprawling across the concrete.

"Mike!" Soleil screamed out. "Get away!" She was trying to push herself up again, desperately trying to ignore the long gash on her arm. And although her arms were pushing the ground she could not seem to get her body to move the way she wanted to.

Gloria snarled as she leapt to her feet, her teeth bared. Her gaze was hard and cold. She leapt forward again, this time towards them.

Soleil snarled, as she twisted the sword around, so that the blade was pointed towards Gloria. It was not intimidated by her- it shifted to the side, avoiding the stab, and went for her neck again.

"Stop!"

Soleil cried out as someone pushed her sword arm away to throw themselves in front of her. Mike cried out as the velociraptor slash at his chest, sending his blood spraying everywhere-

"No!"

Mike's body fell backwards onto her. He landed on her with a rouge thump, and did not move.

Gloria stood over them. She did not pant, as humans did. She looked just as intimidating and powerful as she had when they had started.

“You would protect each other in this way…?” Gloria asked, sounding bemused. “Why? Are you not enemies?”

Soleil clenched her hand into a fist. “No man is my enemy.” She responded. “I will not allow innocents to be dragged into your war against Amaris Yew.”

“Is he truly innocent, Blade?” Gloria asked her quietly. “Do you not wish to stop Amaris Yew? His blood is the only reason she lives still…”

“He is.” Soleil repeated stubbornly. “He has been deceived. He does not truly grasp just what he is doing-“ She could feel Mike moaning in pain on top of her. He had not been killed by the attack.

“That does not excuse him from what he has chosen to do.” Gloria told her. “He must die, Hunter. Surely you know this.”

“I will not allow it!”

Gloria bared her teeth. “Your courage is commendable.” She acknowledged. “Even when pushed to the brink you are steadfast in your beliefs. You are not my enemy, Soleil Blade… I regret that we could not meet on the battlefield as allies.

She leaned forward and prodded her nose against Mike’s body. He let out a pained moan as she pushed him onto his stomach. The blood from the wound had seeped all around them- it looked severe. She felt her stomach lurch as Gloria stood over him, and began to speak.

“Mors tua, vita mea…”

“Never say die.”

Gloria thrust her head upward, looking surprised at the new voice. Sitting there on the steps to the house sat Amaris Yew, smiling gently.

“I would think that phrase suits your kind better, Astorian.” Amaris said, laughing a little, as she got to her feet and stretched. Gloria immediately turned around, her eyes narrowed. She clacked her bracelets together threateningly.

“So you have arrived.” Gloria asked, as she readied her fighting stance. Amaris stepped down the stairs, brushing her hair back with her hand. “I was wondering when we would finally meet.”

“My apologies.” Amaris told her. “I was shopping for a new hat.” She sighed, shaking her head. “I can never find a nice one in a dump like this.”

Gloria’s eyes were focused intently on her. Amaris smiled winningly at her.

“I see that you’ve been busy, Astorian.” She said, as she waved her arm at the destruction around them carelessly. “My neighbors might actually start asking questions.”

“You are just as they say you are.” Gloria told her. “Nothing but a vain primate.”

Amaris laughed. “Is that how I’m remembered down there?” She asked, sounding amused. “Tell me more. Am I feared by your King? Does he still curse Sir Jolly’s name?”

“Quite the opposite, in fact.” Gloria said. “We do not fear you, but we know that you cannot be allowed to live after what you have done. That is why I am here.”

Amaris nodded sagely, as she pressed her finger against her chin. “I see.” She said. “You have to come to deal retribution for my four hundred year old crimes.” She smiled widely. “You sure took your time, didn’t you? You may say that you do not fear me, but your actions tell a different story.”

Gloria crunched her teeth together mightily, emphasizing the power of her jaws and teeth. “I do not fear that which I can kill, Vampire.”

Amaris lowered her hand. Her expression of mirth had disappeared entirely from her face. In its place was a wild, sinister wrath.

“Then you must be very afraid.”

Soleil felt her blood run cold at the dark, almost hypnotizing intonation emanating from Amaris Yew. She had read about it from several accounts, but it was not something she had ever experienced

for herself. Soleil could feel her body seizing up. In between the pain of her battle with Gloria, and Amaris Yew's overpowering aura she could feel herself starting to panic. She felt that she was almost certainly going to die.

"I am Astorian, Vampire." Gloria scoffed. "I have felled many a beast more fearsome than you."

In the blink of an eye the two leapt at each other. The long black trails of Amaris' outfits waved behind her. A number of lasers burst from Gloria's bracelets and cut their way through the streets. Amaris avoided them by converting into smoke, causing them to pass straight through her body. Behind her the house burst into flames.

Amaris raised her hands, and the flames behind her suddenly swelled upward, engulfing the entire house in flames. She lowered her hands, just as quickly, and the flames descended upon her, surrounding her entirely. They enveloped her in a swirling mass of flame, before darting forward towards Gloria.

Gloria gritted her teeth as the flames overwhelmed her. She bent her long powerful legs and leapt backward, nearly twenty feet into the air, and landed some distance away.

"Why did you send another party to Astoria?" She cried suddenly, as the flames flickered downward. Amaris tilted her head to the side, confused.

"Astoria?" She repeated, puzzled. "I have not had the influence to mount another expedition there for hundreds of years…"

She tilted her hand and the fire burst forth again, burning a straight line across the street. Gloria leapt to the side. She bounced again, and again, and strafed around Amaris. More lasers burst forward from Gloria's bracelets, but Amaris avoided them with ease.

Soleil watched the battle. Although the pain in her was overwhelming, she found herself more concerned with her enemies. Both were fighting at a level far beyond her own. For the first time in her life she fully understood the scope of Amaris Yew's power.

"HewwoWHOOPWHOOP!"

Gloria's bestial roar was from another time. Millions of years ago it would have been a sound her ancestors made while on the hunt. She bent her head and leapt upward towards Amaris, who was still floating about ten feet in the air. Her momentum was more than enough to carry her to reach her, but Amaris raised her hand, and a burst of flame shot up between them.

Undeterred, Gloria pushed through the intense flames. Ignoring the burns running up and down her body she grabbed hold of Amaris Yew with her teeth. Amaris screamed as the teeth plunged into her neck, causing blood to burst out in waves. She immediately began to fall, and Gloria barely had time to revel in her victory before the two slammed into the sidewalk.

Soleil shuddered as she tried to push herself upward. She glanced at Mike, and was horrified to see that he was not moving. She tilted her head back towards the fight, only to see Gloria stagger to her feet, her arms held limply at her sides. Amaris lay inside a small crater on the sidewalk, her legs raised unnaturally upright.

"You have earned your reputation, Vampire." Gloria said. "You have fought many battles and died a glorious death." Her claws tapped against the concrete, one after the other. "Your head will make a fine trophy…"

Soleil grimaced as she crawled over to Mike. Ignoring the searing pain in her head, she stared down at his shredded chest in horror. She reached forward and fumbled about with his jacket, trying her best to find some way to bandage the wound.

" Mors Vincit Omnia, Amaris Yew." Gloria said. And she leaned her head down onto Amaris and bit.

Amaris screamed in pain and agony as more blood came pouring out of her neck. Gloria twisted her head, ripping at the skin of the neck. Amaris raised her hand to try and shield herself from the attack, but to no avail.

Soleil was more concerned with Mike. "Stay with me." She hissed, as she pressed her hand against his wounds, trying to stop the

bleeding. “Please… it is almost over. I-“

She paused as she stared at Mike’s face. His lips were moving a little, ever so slightly. She pushed herself on top of him, trying to make out his words. The last of the sun’s rays fell. It was now night.

“Amaris…”

Soleil froze, a little taken aback.

“I… I love… Amaris…”

Soleil found herself nodding along.

“Yes.” She said, her voice as firm as she could manage. “Amaris… you want to see her again, don’t you? You must live. You must-“

“I… need…”

The screams from Amaris Yew became downright animalistic. It would not be long now, Soleil thought wildly. It would not be long until Amaris Yew was dead and this nightmare could end.

“To protect you…”

Mike’s hand suddenly slammed down onto the concrete with surprising force. Soleil gasped in surprise as the hand closed itself into a fist. The hand came up and pressed itself against Mike’s forehead. Soleil stared at it. She could make out a small, round object in his hand.

“What-“

Mike’s eyes suddenly burst open. His mouth widened in a mighty beast like grimace. The cuts on his chest began to heal themselves, and the strands of hair on his body began to lengthen and become thicker.

Soleil did not even have time to make sense of the transformation before Mike reached up a hand and swatted her away, sending her tumbling into the concrete. She slammed her head into the surface, spilling more of her blood onto the street. She lay there, staring up at the sky, hardly even aware of her surroundings.

Mike got to his feet, growling viciously as he eyed the raptor. His limbs lengthened as he bent over and placed his forearms on the ground to run on all fours.

"Awwwwwooooooooo!"

He charged towards Gloria, swinging wildly. Gloria was completely taken by surprise- she turned and was slapped aside by his paw. She hit the concrete with force, slamming her head across the ground. Bright greenish blood leaked out of her head as she staggered to her feet. She had not caught herself during the fall.

"Who-"

Mike did not hesitate. He descended upon her again, his claws bared, but this time Gloria was ready. She neatly evaded the clumsy blow and closed the distance between them. She raised her arms upward brought the lasers up to his chest.

"Rooohoohoo-"

Gloria cried out as Amaris Yew suddenly reached out of the crater and grabbed her leg. It was enough to throw her off balance. She was already tumbling to the ground as Mike set herself upon her, tearing his claws into her flesh. Gloria could not even let out screams as her innards spilled out into the streets. Black and green organs fell out of her incised chest as she stood there, staring in front of her.

Amaris Yew rose from the crater, floating several inches above the ground. Her head had nearly been torn from her neck, and pieces of her bones were sticking out from her neck and down her back. Despite her intense injuries she somehow still had that aura of terrible, otherworldly beauty. Mike stared at her, completely enraptured. His large jaw hanging open.

She stepped down onto the concrete and stared at Gloria.

"Mors Mihi Lucrum." She said, her voice sinister and cold. She reached out and stroked Gloria's face, almost sensually. "Mortals often do not quite grasp that."

She gently pushed her hand against Gloria's face and she tumbled backward with a thud. Amaris gave a dark smile as she turned away.

She stepped past Mike without acknowledging him. He followed behind her as she stepped up to Soleil, who was staring up weakly at her.

"You have done me a great service, hunter." Amaris said quietly. "You did not have to protect my beloved in my absence. It would have benefitted you greatly if you had simply let him die at the hands of my enemies."

She kneeled down, staring down at her with wide, unblinking eyes.

"Yet you still did it." She said. "There was so much at stake for you, and yet you still did the right thing." She got down on her knees and bent over Soleil. She reached out a hand and stroked her face, her hand brushing up against the trail of red blood running down it. "Such a deed should not go unrewarded."

Soleil seized up as Amaris bent closer down to her. Soleil's breath hitched in her throat as Amaris' lips came closer and closer to her neck.

"Hgggh…."

Soleil tried to muster up the strength to ball her hand into a fist, but Amaris pressed her own hand against it, pressing it downward.

Vampires did not need to breath, but for some reason Soleil could still feel her cool breath on her skin regardless. Soleil closed her eyes, preparing for the end.

Amaris kissed her cheek.

"Thanks." She whispered into her ear as she pulled away. Soleil did not respond- she had fallen asleep.

"She needs to go to the hospital." Amaris murmured. "And I…"

She swayed a little. Mike immediately reached a arm around her and caught her.

"Need Blood." She finished. "Pray… come."

Mike led her back to the house. He lifted her up the stairs to the door and when they reached it he reached forward and grabbed the handle. He pulled, and the door ripped out of the door frame. Amaris chuckled weakly.

"Transform back…" She purred, as he led her into the hallway. "Let me get a good look at you…"

## Chapter 9

Amaris Yew sat on her throne. Her bare legs crossed out in front of her. She was smiling a little as she leaned into her fist. Her short black dress was frilly and lacey, and made of the finest materials. Splatters of blood ran up and down her arms, legs, face, clothes, and shoes. On both sides of her large, ornate pikes were erected from the ground. The three closest to her were unmarked and clean, but the five others surrounding her were anything but. The large, vicious head of a shark leered forward, its eyes still hungry even in death. Next to it was a large, full scale portrait of Taylor Bell. Someone had childishly scribbled crayons and marker over it to give her long fans and feral looking eyes before impaling it through the neck. A red like substance had been splashed across the spear to give it a more striking look. Behind her was the head of the Alien creature. It was just as frightening in death as it had been in life. To its right was the head of Esmeralda. Although it had been charred to a crisp, it was still very much recognizable as the Wicked Witch of Notre Dame. The odd green hue of the skin had given the burned odd a particularly distinct look. Next to her was the head of the Velociraptor Huntress, Gloria. The pike had been embedded through her mouth rather than the top of her head. Her eyes were blank and staring.

Mike pulled away from the photo, a little disgruntled, as Amaris cheerfully slid it back across the table and into her hand.

"Do I look cool or what?" She asked.

"Sure…" Mike said cautiously as she slipped the picture into an envelope and flipped it over. She bent her head and neatly scribbled

on it.

“The Brides are going to get a kick out of this!” She giggled, as she finished writing out the address with a flourish.

Amaris had been particularly energetic ever since she had recovered from the battle with Gloria. She seemed to be practically glowing with a powerful aura that enveloped everything around her. She was more beautiful now than ever.

Even in his current state, Mike could see that. He shivered, his mind already longing to go to bed. He was exhausted- over the past couple of days Amaris had had him far more than usual in order to regain her strength and recover from her injuries. He was glad to see that she was better- but he was also starting to be a little thankful that she required nothing more of him. He wasn’t sure just how much blood he could offer her without collapsing.

“I hope they get it before they send the next one.” Amaris said cheerfully, as she got to her feet and waved the envelope behind her. “I’m starting to think that I can turn things around. I can win this.”

Mike nodded, unable to really speak as Amaris laughed and spun around. She raised her leg upright, rather like a ballerina, and posed with a wide grin across her face.

“Let’s go visit Soleil.” She said. “And thank her for everything she has done for us.”

Mike tried not to look too excited, lest Amaris get the wrong idea. In truth he had been anxious about seeing Soleil again since the battle with Gloria, although he had not wanted to upset Amaris by wanting to talk to another woman. They were silent as they put on their outside things and stepped out into the late fall chill.

Amaris brought her new hat over her eyes to shield her from the sun. Although she had regained much of her strength, the wounds inflicted by Gloria had caused her to be unusually bothered by sunlight. Mike could see small cracks running up and down her face.

Despite her clear discomfort, however, she did not complain. Mike found that admirable.

They began to fade almost immediately after they stepped back into the confines of the local hospital. The people milling around the hall did not give them a second glance as they stepped up to the front counter.

“Hello.” Amaris said politely. “We’re here to see our friend…”

They were told the room number and told to enter the elevator at the other end of the room. Amaris thanked her and led Mike towards the elevator.

They did not speak in the elevator. They rode upward in silence and stepped out into a white hallway.

“I wonder how many stiches she had to have.” Amaris asked cheerfully. Mike tried to smile, but he was too troubled to do so. Amaris noticed.

“Are you worried about her?”

Mike did not think it would be a good idea to lie. “Yes.”

“I am too.” Amaris was looking around at the signs on the walls. “This way.”

Mike followed her obediently down the hallway to the right. Soleil’s room was not far- they passed nothing but empty rooms before they came to a stop in front of Soleil’s door.

“Should we knock?” Amaris asked him.

“Probably.”

Amaris pushed the door open without knocking and stepped inside. A blonde figure was lying face up on the bed in front of them, but the instant the door burst open the figure sat up.

“You-“

Soleil had already reached for the nearest weapon- a lamp sitting by her bedside- and threw it. It awkwardly flew threw the air at Amaris.

She did not move as the lamp slammed into her head and burst into pieces at her feet. “That wasn’t yours.” She chided, as she stepped further into the room towards Soleil’s bedside. Soleil flinched as Amaris sat down on her bedside and placed her hand on her leg.

“Feeling any better?”

Soleil snorted.

“Does your Mother know about your little altercation?”

“Do not dare speak of my Mother.”

Amaris laughed, placing a hand over her mouth. “I’m sorry, please forgive me. I didn’t mean to walk all over you. Not while you’re in such a sorry condition.”

Soleil glared hatefully at her as she got to her feet and strode across the room towards the window. She allowed the sunlight to fall directly across her face, giving her an intimidating, scarred look.

“The day is approaching, Blade.” She said. “It will not be long now until I am ready to reclaim my throne and put an end to this sorry state of affairs once and for all. The Brides will be slain.”

She lowered her hat across her eyes. “We do not have to be enemies.” She said. “I desire to eliminate the Brides of Dracula- we share the same goal. There is no real reason for us to fight. I want nothing more for us to be friends, Soleil.”

She turned back around, sliding the hat off of her head as she leaned in over the side of her bed.

“We can be together Soleil.” She hissed suggestively. “It will not be a Vampire that defeats the Brides- it will be a mortal. It could be very well be you. Or-“

To Soleil’s horror, she turned around again, her eyes meeting Mike’s. He flinched.

“It could be the new bearer of the Mark of the Wolves.” She purred. “My love…”

“You will keep him out of this.” Soleil snapped angrily. “He would be killed immediately!” Mike took a step forward, opening his mouth as if to speak his mind, but he fell back as Amaris flipped her hair back with her hand. He pulled back, a little bashful.

“With his blood on my side I cannot possibly fail.” Amaris told her. “My victory over the Brides is practically assured. I cannot, however, guarantee that there will be no casualties among innocents.”

Soleil’s eyes flashed. “Are you threatening-“

“No.” Amaris told her. “I am merely giving you a warning. If the Brides and I are too evenly matched, we will be forced to go to war. And if that happens, all of Europe will be dragged into our conflict.”

Soleil glared darkly at her.

“The only way to prevent this from happening is to ally yourself with my cause.” Amaris went on. “If we defeat the Brides quickly and decisively, we can take their castle and claim it as our own before they have time to rally their forces. I will have claimed Romania and taken my rightful throne as one of the Seven before the end of the year.”

She leaned in closer.

“However, if you do not choose to help me...” She licked her lips. “Please understand. I cannot go to war and pull punches.”

She stood up.

“Please discuss this with your Hunter’s Guild.” She said. “I welcome your cooperation.”

She turned and stepped past Mike and out the door. He turned his head to look at her, surprised, before looking back to Soleil.

“Soleil-“

He stepped forward, his hand raised, and then his hand fell.

“Please…”

He turned and followed Amaris out of the room. Soleil watched the door shut behind them. She turned her head downward, towards her

blankets. Her hands were balled into fists.

"What have I done…"

No, that was not the way to think. She chided herself harshly. She had been faced with a difficult situation. She could not kidnap Mike against his will or kill him. She had hoped that he would eventually see Amaris Yew for what she truly was, but it seemed that her hopes had been in vain. He had reached the point where he was willing to fight and die for her. And with the Mark of the Wolves he could-possibly- become a very great threat indeed.

But it was his human form that had her the most troubled. The blood he so willingly offered to Amaris was giving her the boost she needed to strike back against her enemies.

Soleil was beginning to feel a strong sense of dread. She was hurt. She would not be on her feet again for quite some time. Gloria had done a real number on her.

She could not panic. She reminded herself, somewhat harshly. She could not afford to. She had to think of a way to fix all of this. She just had to.

…

"How did Soleil get hurt?" Alexa asked. She seemed really upset and very, very curious. Mike was not quite sure what to tell her.

"I- I don't know." He lied, averting his eyes from her. Alexa scowled.

"You're a terrible liar, you know that?" Alexa told him, scowling. "Am I going to have to track down Amaris and have her tell me the truth?"

"I am not a particularly honest person." Amaris said, as she glided up from behind. Alexa jumped, suddenly looking very bashful. Despite being quite a bit taller than Amaris, and far more athletic, she seemed almost intimidated by her.

Amaris reached out and wrapped her fingers around Mike's hand. He took it, squeezing it gently. "We are more alike than they think." She purred. Mike nodded, turning his attention away from Alexa.

“I’m so lucky to be with you.” He told her. She smiled. It was a beautiful, radiant thing.

Word had spread about Soleil’s injuries, but not the exact nature of them.

“Western authorities don’t like talking about the supernatural.” Amaris explained to him quietly. “It leads to situations like the Salem Witch Trials… where innocents are accused of being something they aren’t. Please don’t tell anyone about Soleil.”

He did as she had asked and had not discussed the situation with anyone. It was very difficult- everyone suspected that he must know *something.* His awkward attempts at deflection and changing the subject did not do much to deter their curiosity.

“You will not have to do for much longer.” Amaris promised him, one night as they lay in bed together. Although she did not sleep she had taken to the habit of lying there with him. She stroked his arms lovingly. “It will not be long until we leave this place behind.”

Europe… she was going to take him to Europe. The thought both excited and worried him. What would his friends and parents think? Amaris was quick to put his concerns at rest.

“You have me now.” She told him. “You will need for nothing other than my love.”

He was just overthinking things, surely. Amaris was the best thing that had ever happened to him. He needed to be there for her, no matter what.

Now, that Amaris had seen fit to grant him the Mark of the Wolves… he was able to defend himself. To some degree, at any rate. He had not transformed at all since that day-(Amaris had warned him not to overexert himself as he recovered from his injuries) but merely having it with him was a bit of a relief in his mind.

“Use it as a last resort for now.” Amaris told him. “If you show promise, perhaps we could even fight alongside each other on the battlefield.”

He had taken to carrying the Mark of the Wolves with him everywhere he went. He kept it in his pocket, always close at hand, and regularly checked to make sure it was there.

One day while he was doing this someone bumped into him.

"Oh-"

His hand slipped out of his pocket and the Mark of the Wolves fell to the ground.

"Oh, excuse me." The girl said shortly, as she bent her head. "Let me get that-" She lowered herself to the ground before Mike could stop her and wrapped her hand around it. She stood back up and smiled at him.

"Here you-"

She stopped. She frowned, and tilted her head. Mike stared at her, wide eyed.

"Have we met?" Taylor inquired, sounding a little troubled. "You look very-"

"No." Mike said quickly. "No. We haven't."

"Okay." Taylor did not sound convinced. Her eyes flickered downward, towards the palm of her hand. To Mike's horror the Mark lay face upward. The wolf inscriptions seemed to be snarling up at them.

"This… what is this?" Taylor asked, again sounding very perplexed. "I… I've seen this before. I know I have."

"You're imagining things, Taylor."

Taylor shot her eyes towards him. "You know my name."

He flinched and took a step backward. Taylor stared at him.

"You are… Mike…" She closed her hand around the Mark of the Wolves. And then she jolted.

"Mike!"

She darted towards him. He instinctively leapt backwards as Taylor threw himself at him. He could not get away fast enough. Taylor had wrapped her arms around him before he could even move.

"T-Taylor-"

She did not pull away. She was speaking in a rush.

"Mike, I'm so sorry. I.. I let myself… You… And Amaris Yew… and… and…."

She took another glance at her hand and yelped. She stepped away from him, eyes wide.

"Where did you get this?" She demanded, almost a little angry.

"I-"

"This was mine." Taylor breathed, as she stared at the Mark. "It was a gift. To…. To..."

"To kill me."

Despite the people milling about all over the hallway, despite being surrounded by people, their blood ran cold at the soft, dangerous tone.

Amaris was standing above them, staring down with red unblinking eyes. Taylor felt a chill run down her spine. It was a look that could kill.

"You are lucky that I did not feel the need to kill you, human." Amaris told her, as she slowly stepped down the stairs, her hand trailing along the railing. Taylor took a step back, away from her and closer to the wall. "I thought that you would stay out of my way."

She cast a look at Mike. He flinched. "Apparently not."

Amaris flipped her hair back as she turned back to Taylor. "Drop the Mark." She commanded. "Now."

Taylor clutched her fist. "No."

"Stupid girl." Amaris snarled. "It is still daylight. You cannot transform now. And even if you could… would you truly want to risk hurting those around you?"

“You’re hurting Mike.”

Mike shot a look towards her, surprised. Amaris laughed.

“We do sometimes hurt the ones we love.” She conceded. “I will not say it again, child. Drop the Mark.”

Taylor shook her head vehemently as her hand tightened more firmly around the Mark.

Amaris did not speak again. She seemed to grow in size as she came closer to Taylor, a cold expression splashed across her face. Taylor felt her heart chill.

“What’s all this?”

Amaris stopped. Her expression became neutral as she turned around to face the teacher standing on the stairs behind them.

“Nothing.” Amaris said. “I just need something from her, that is all-“

Taylor did not hesitate. She leapt forward and dashed down the stairs. Amaris whirled back around, her hair floating wildly behind her as she furiously watched her leave.

“What did you need from her?” The teacher asked, clearly a little taken aback. Amaris sighed, but did not answer. She beckoned for Mike to come, and he followed her down the stairs briskly.

Taylor was already long gone.

Amaris stared across the hallway, her eyes flickering across the various doors and turns that Taylor could have made, before irritably turning around towards Mike.

“She is our next enemy.” She said to him coldly. “We cannot let her ruin my plans.”

She turned away from him. “I want you to update your Twitter.” She said. “I want you to tell everyone that you need to find Taylor, and that if anyone knows where she is to please let you know.”

Mike nodded. Already his hand was in his pocket to bring out his phone. She was already walking away from him, subtly peering into each of the rooms and subsequent hallways she passed.

Taylor had disappeared. She did not show up for any of her classes and none of her friends seemed to know just where she had gone.

“She’s hiding from us.” Amaris deduced, as she stepped around the table where Mike ate in silence. “She is trying to decide what her next move will be.”

She had the air of a military commander. Powerful, insightful. Somehow above him. Mike felt even more intimidated by her than he usually did.

“She lacks experience.” Amaris went on. “But she could prove herself to be very dangerous. If we allow her to grow.”

She turned around to face him. Gone were the flirty, longing look that she gave him whenever they were alone together. In its place was the fierce, animalistic glare that she gave her enemies.

“I need to deal with her.’ She said. “By any means necessary.”

…

Taylor let out a sob as she pressed herself against the concrete. The cool surface did nothing to calm her nerves. Her heart was still racing- She had left school in a hurry, before classes had even let out for the day. Usually she hated doing that. It was hard enough as it was to plan for college without Dad’s support, but under the circumstances-

She let out another sob, and slid to the ground. She had no idea what she was going to do. She could not go home, she could not go to school, she could not consult her friends…

Her throat hitched in her throat. She almost wailed.

“Don’t worry…”

A soft, musical voice suddenly hit her ears and she stiffened, the scream dying in her throat. She felt  embarrassed to be sitting here, alone, in this alley with a stranger she couldn’t see.

“Be happy…”

It was a young woman's voice. Taylor looked up, trying to see just who was speaking in that sing-song sort of tone. But she saw no one.

"Who's-"

"Don't worry…"

A figure stepped away from the wall directly across from her, seemingly out of the shadows themselves. Taylor jumped in surprise as the thin figure gave her a wide smile.

"Be happy…"

She was very thin and flat chested. Her clothes were dirty and torn, her blonde hair short and unkempt.

She stepped forward and squatted down in front of Taylor. She sat down in a crisscross position and stared at her, almost contemplatively. She did not look threatening, but something about her seemed off putting and rather eerie. They did not speak as they looked at each other.

The woman smiled.

"You've calmed down a little." She said. "Amazing what a little scare can do." She almost hummed out the words- her speech had a strange, almost musical quality to it.

It was true, Taylor realized suddenly. She had calmed down. The panic had, for a brief moment at least, made her forget her dilemma.

"Now." The woman said, as she tilted her head to the side, rather like a dog. "Taylor… do not be afraid."

Taylor stiffened.

"How did you know my name?"

The woman smiled. It was a radiant, beautiful thing. Her teeth were a pure, pearly white… a stark contrast to the rest of her appearance. "I've been watching Yew." She explained.

"You've been watching me?"

She giggled. “No. I was watching Yew. Amaris Yew.” She giggled again. Taylor almost chuckled herself. It was a dumb joke, but somehow it came off as almost endearing. “And I saw how she threatened you.”

“Do you know-?”

The woman nodded. “More than anyone.” She said. She turned her head away, to Taylor’s left. Taylor winced once she caught sight of the side of her neck. A large, clearly audible bite mark was scarred onto her neck.

“She gives one hell of a hickey.” The woman said, as she turned back towards Taylor. Taylor stared at her, trying to piece together.

“So-“

“Amaris Yew turned me into a vampire.” The woman said, her voice soft and patient. “My name is Sonny the Smile… it is a pleasure to meet you.”

Taylor flinched as Sonny scooted over closer to her. Having seen Amaris handle Mike before, she half expected her to press herself up close to her. But she did not. Instead she joined her in sitting up against the wall, in a sitting position.

“I see that Amaris has you running scared.” She said. “She made you feel all alone… didn’t she?”

Taylor nodded, her mouth somewhat dry. Sonny smiled winningly at her.

“There is no need to be afraid.” She said. “I have no need to prey on humans. I am nothing like Amaris Yew.”

She shifted a little  in place, tottering back and forth. “In fact, I have no intention of doing anything else than helping you.”

“Help me…?”

Sonny the Smile stood up suddenly, unnaturally quickly.

“Find Soleil Blade.” She said. “She will be able to give you more advice on how best to protect Mike. Leave Lady Yew to me,

alright…?”

She gave a wave, and then stepped back out into the street.

“Wait-“

Taylor scrambled to her feet, but before she could chase after her, she was already gone.

Taylor looked around frantically for a couple of minutes before giving up. She stopped in front of a restaurant and leaned up against the side, thinking deeply about what she had been told.

“Soleil…”

Did she mean Soleil Blade, the girl who had been hurt? Had Amaris gotten to her too? The thought was disturbing- had Amaris really attacked another girl? Her mind was racing as she made her way to the hospital.

“Are you a friend of Soleil’s?”

Taylor almost struggled to nod. She wasn’t- they had never really spoken- but she did need to speak with her.

She ascended in the elevator and stepped out into the hallway. She found Soleil’s room open. She took a deep breath and stepped inside.

The blonde girl on the bed turned to look at her. She seemed a little confused.

“Hello…?”

Taylor shuddered and dropped her gaze. Was this really the person she needed to speak with?

“Soleil?”

“Yes.” She said. “And you are…?”

“Umm…” Taylor bit her lip, wondering just how best to explain herself. “I’m… a friend of Mike’s…”

She reached into her pocket and pulled out the Mark of the Wolves. Soleil’s eyes widened. Emboldened by this, the rest of the story

came out in a rush.

“And then this woman appeared, and told me to find you.”

“A woman?” Soliel asked sharply. It had been the first question she had posed. “Who was she?”

“She called herself… Um, Sonny the Smile.”

Soleil’s expression darkened.

“Um, did I say something wrong?”

“No, no.” Soleil said quickly. “No, you did the right thing to find me…” She coughed mid—sentence, placing her fist over her mouth to cover it. She continued as if she had not been interrupted. “It is just…. Sonny the Smile is a Vampire, just like Amaris Yew.”

“She told me that she didn’t prey on humans.”

“And she doesn’t.” Soleil answered. “But that doesn’t make her any less dangerous to people.”

“But…” Taylor hesitated, unsure of how best to pose her question without sounding like an idiot. “If they’re both vampires… why are they fighting each other?”

“Politics.” Soleil answered briefly. “Amaris Yew is one of the few that resist the new Noctis regime and clings to the old ways.”

Taylor nodded. Her curiosity at already been piqued.

“And what about you?” She asked. “How do you fit into all of this?”

Soleil leaned her head back into the pillow. “I’m a Vampire Hunter.” She admitted, her eyes closed. “I… have to kill them both.”

She sounded somewhat bitter. Taylor barely knew her- she wasn’t quite sure what the problem even was- but she had calmed down a lot since they had met.

She stepped closer, a little cautiously. “Is there anything I-“

Soleil shook her head.

“No, there is-“

She paused.

“Perhaps there is something you can do.” She said slowly. “I would never ask you to take on Amaris Yew yourself… but steal something away from her. Something she needs more than anything.”

“What’s that?”

“A boy named Mike Rose.”

Taylor took a step back. She bent her head and flushed. Soleil stared at her blankly.

“Are you acquainted?”

Taylor nodded, brushing her bangs out of her face.

“Y-yeah…” She stammered. “I saw him with her… today…”

She had almost forgotten how much that annoyed her. She ground her feet against the ground, feeling a little bit more confident. Amaris Yew was just another bitch that needed to be put in her place.

Or at least, that’s what she tried to tell herself.

Soleil sat up in bed, thinking deeply. “Mike Rose is the key to all of this.” She said. “I cannot explain why this is, but his blood seems to have special qualities to it. Amaris Yew seems to recover from injuries and become stronger than she should when she feeds off of him.”

“Feeds-“

“She feeds on his blood at least twice a week, sometimes more.” Soleil interrupted. “Mike believes they are in a relationship, and allows this to happen. He is the sort of person who enjoys being used.”

Taylor’s eyes flashed at her. “Don’t talk about him that-“

“I am not blaming him.” Soleil denied, against interrupting her. “Many of the greatest leaders in European history have been charmed by her. It is almost impossible for ordinary people to resist her demands.”

Soleil paused. “If we are to defeat Amaris Yew, or at least incapacitate her, we need to get Mike away from her.”

“We-“

Soleil nodded. “I am in no position to do anything just yet.” She said, to Taylor’s horror. “I need some more time to recover before I can act. But if Sonny the Smile has reached out to you….”

She paused again.

“Perhaps we can use this to our advantage.” Soleil said slowly.

…

That evening Taylor found herself staring up at the home of Amaris Yew, feeling a strong sense of dread. The Mark of the Wolves was clutched tightly in her hand- Soleil had asked her to take very good care of it. Taylor did not need to ask why.

“Excited, are you?”

Taylor jumped. Sonny the Smile stepped out behind her, already humming a sweet melody.

“Your first time is always the most memorable.” Sonny told her, almost teasingly, as she turned her head to the house. “You’re scared. I was too.” Now she sounded almost wistful. “Ah, to be young again…”

“What…are you going to do?” Taylor asked, a little anxious.

“It’s simple.” Sonny said cheerfully. “I’ll distract Amaris, and you steal Mike. You know each other, he very may well actually listen to you.”

“He never has before.” Taylor said grimly. Sonny laughed jovially.

“Like I said, there’s a first time for everything.” Sonny told her. “Don’t be scared to use the Mark if you have to… alright?”

Soleil had said something similar. She had said to use the Mark only in emergencies. However Sonny seemed to be encouraging her to use it much more liberally.

“Does she know we’re here?” Taylor asked, changing the subject. Sonny titled her head, considering the question.

“It’s hard to say.” Sonny said. “I don’t THINK so… But then again, I think a lot of things that are wrong. Let’s see.”

To Taylor’s horror Sonny confidently strode forward, towards the steps to the house, and climbed upward. Sonny shot a playful look behind at her.

“Don’t be bashful.” She chided. “Hesitation could get you killed.”

Taylor nodded, biting her lips as she quietly followed up the steps. Sonny lazily raised her hand and rapped it across the surface of the door.

“Pray, enter…”

Sonny rolled her eyes as the door slowly, and almost creepily, began to slide open. “Is that enough of an answer for you?” Sonny asked her, as she stepped into the frame of the door, the shadow of the house falling across her face.

BANG

Taylor screamed as Sonny reeled backward, the shotgun pellets embedding themselves into her forehead, neck, chest, and shoulders. A black, inky substance burst forward from her skin like a spray from a fountain. Sonny took a step backward, back into the sun.

Almost immediately the bullets popped back out of her body, clattering to the stone steps in droves. Taylor stood, gaping as Sonny straightened herself. The wounds, right before her eyes, were healing shut.

“I thought it was you.”

The shadowy visage of Amaris Yew stepped forward, into the frame of the door. Taylor covered her mouth, aghast as she caught sight of the shotgun in her hand. Amaris played with it, twirling it in between her fingers, not paying her any mind.

Sonny’s smile, amazingly enough, widened. “Amaris Yew.” She purred, as she raised her arms outward, as if she wanted to hug her. “It has been far too long-“

BANG

Sonny did not even reel this time. The pellets slammed into her and clattered to the ground at her feet. They had not even pierced her skin. Amaris growled as she tossed the gun away, into the house.

“I did not know that you owned a gun.” Sonny purred. “My how the times have changed.

Taylor flinched backward as Amaris stepped forward, setting the gun aside in mid air. It scooted off by itself further into the house and out of sight.

“They have.” Amaris acknowledged. “And yet I see that you still have not learned how to take a bath.”

“This argument again?” Sonny asked, still smiling. “Some things never change-“

Amaris punched, catching Sonny square in the jaw. She went reeling, spinning down the steps until her head slammed straight into the concrete.

Amaris pulled her fist back, staring at the body of Sonny the Smile with a dark expression. “You are still not a match for me.” She said quietly. “Even after all this time.”

Sonny pushed herself upward and launched herself off the ground. She landed on her feet nearly as she stared up at Amaris with a clear look of defiance.

“I doubt that very much, Miss Yew.” She said. Amaris snarled. Taylor cried out as a dark, evil energy surrounded her, completely overwhelming her. Amaris launched herself forward, her hands outstretched towards Sonny.

Sonny ducked, bending her head over towards Amaris. She darted forward, as Amaris closed on in on, slamming her head into hers with a vicious headbutt. Amaris cried out as her hands went limp.

“Hiiiiiiiiyaaaah!”

Sonny quickly reached forward and grabbed Amaris’ neck. In one quick movement she slammed the other vampire into the concrete.

She took several steps back, waving her hands about wildly as she surveyed her work.

“How’s that?” Sonny preened, as she struck a pose. “Hot stuff, right?”

The smile did not fade from her face as Amaris slithered back to her feet, raising her arms towards her, scowling.

“I’ve gotten slower.” She admitted. Sonny laughed.

“Told you so.” She stepped forward, her bare feet padding along the concrete, her open palm facing Amaris. Amaris gave a dark, but still very confident look as she took her own fighting stance. Sonny’s eyes flickered over her.

“Isn’t it hard to fight in heels?”

“I like hearing the bones of my enemies crack under them.” Amaris said coldly. Taylor could not pull her eyes away from the scene in front of her. It was like something out of a movie.

“Taylor.”

She almost jumped.

“Aren’t you forgetting something?”

She slid backward, through the door of the house, gave one last nod towards Sonny, and turned around, racing into the depths of the house. Amaris did not turn to watch to go. Her attention was focused completely on Sonny.

“It is just you and me here Amaris.” Sonny purred. “If you want to say something that wasn’t meant for the young lady’s ears… you best say it now.”

“I have said my piece, hippie.” Amaris said coldly. “The only thing left for you now is to make your choice. Do you want to join me? Or die?”

Sonny giggled. “Die?” She repeated, amused. “By your hand? Like, come on.”

Amaris punched forward again, causing Sony block it with her arm and push it aside. It  breezed past Sonny's head. Amaris growled,, baring her teeth as she lurched forward. Sonny stepped backward, narrowly avoiding the bite, before smacking Amaris across the head.

It was not a strong blow- it barely even grazed her. Amaris looked up at her, surprised, as Sonny smirked. She was mocking her.

Enraged, Amaris took another jab at her head. Sonny, still smiling, again took a step back and slapped it aside.

Sonny was a very passive fighter. She would block all of Amaris's strikes without fail, but never seriously try to counterattack. She was trying to play with her, Amaris had realized. But to what end?

Taylor turned in the house, trying to get her bearings.

"Hello?"

The house seemed unusually desolate and looked almost unlived in. It was dark, and somehow uncomfortable to walk through.

"Mike?"

He was not on the ground floor. She turned her attention to the stairs and slowly began to climb up them, hand on the cold railing. The cries and sounds of fighting outside were growing increasingly louder. Although they were growing farther away from her, she could not help but feel increasingly nervous.

"Mike?"

There was no sound coming from the upper floor. She reached the top of the stairs and surveyed the hallway apprehensively. It stretched out quite a ways in both directions. All the doors were closed.

"Hello?"

Something crashed from behind her. She cast a glance towards the bottom of the stairs. She decided it was in her best interest to get some more distance between the battle. She turned to the right, and reached for the first door down the hall.

It was an empty sitting room. She stepped inside, vaguely wondering if there was anywhere where he could be hiding, when the sound of quick footsteps suddenly hit her ears.

“Hey-“

She stepped back into the hall to see Mike race downstairs, looking panic. Taylor did not hesitate.

“Mike!”

He did not stop. She chased him down the stairs and back to the front door. He was in then process of opening it when she finally caught up to him.

“Arrrrgh!”

She slammed into him. The force of her weight on his caused the half open door to slam shut. Mike hit the door, and Taylor quickly wrestled him to the ground. It was not as hot as she had always imagined it would be- he was struggling quite roughly.

“Bitch!” She snarled, as she brought down her fist on his face. He cried out as a spurt of blood came pouring out of his nose. The two of them froze, staring at each other.

“...Taylor?” Mike whispered, surprised. She nodded, easing off him a little.

“Yeah.” She said, trying to catch her breath. “What? Did you not recognize me?”

“I was running away!” He protested.

The two stared at each other, and then broke out into giggles. It was a while before they calmed down.

“Sorry about your nose.” She told him. “I-“

She never got to finish her sentence. The front door that they had slammed shut burst open. Taylor looked up, horrified, as the wild face of Amaris Yew stood over her. She was tall… far, far taller than either of them. And so beautiful… oh, so beautiful…

“His blood his MINE.”

Taylor could do nothing but sprawl over Mike protectively, tears in her eyes as she protested. “No, stop-“

“Amaris…” Mike murmured.

“Amaris Yew!” Sonny the Smile called out from behind her. “Your battle is with me. Leave the children alone!”

Amaris Yew slid into the room, her eyes wide and staring. The door slammed shut behind her, casting the entire room in darkness. Taylor stiffened as she came closer to them, hanging over them like a particularly vengeful spirit.

“Get up.”

Taylor obeyed, shakily getting to her feet. She could not bring herself to say no to that voice. She gave a start as the door behind Amaris slowly opened. Sonny leaned against the frame of the door, seemingly at ease.

“He’s not dead, Amaris.” She said, sounding almost amused. “A nosebleed wouldn’t kill him. There’s no need to panic.”

Amaris turned to face her. In the darkness of the room her icy glare tore into her.

“Come, Taylor.” Sonny said, beckoning towards her. “We have done all we can. For now.”

Taylor stepped past Amaris Yew, who did not move a muscle as she walked up to where Sonny was standing. She smiled at her.

“A little worse for wear?”

“A little.” Taylor admitted.

“One step at a time.” Sonny reminded her, as she wrapped her arm around her and shut the door. They stepped down the stairs and down the street.

Amaris Yew did not watch them go. She instead turned her head downward, to Mike’s face.

“You hurt yourself.” She said quietly. “That…”

She reached forward and touched his face. She trailed her fingers along his bloodstained upper lip. “That’s not okay.” She said. “Never again.”

She spoke with a tone of finality. Mike knew that he must do as he was told.

Chapter 10

“It went that poorly, huh…?”

Taylor nodded, trying to hide her amazement as Soleil easily raised herself up and over the bar. Soleil struck her legs outward, easily holding the position, before pushing herself onto a bar handstand. It was an incredible display of strength and finesse. Taylor wondered how long she had been training in order to be able to do that.

“Not poorly.” Taylor said quickly. “I just think… we didn’t succeed. That’s all.”

“A very admirable attitude to have.” Soleil told her, to her great pleasure. She raised her right hand and balanced solely on her left. “We cannot just give up. In another couple of days I will be fit to join you.”

She seemed plenty fit to her, Taylor thought enviously as she bent her leg and brought it up near her head.

“With you and Sonny fighting together, Amaris won’t stand a chance.”

Soleil looked upward, giving her a look. Taylor got the impression immediately that she had just said something very stupid.

“What is it?”

Soleil bent her head again. “Forgive me.” She said. “I did not mean to judge you… you know nothing of these things.” She switched legs, and then elaborated. “Sonny the Smile and I are not allies. We simply have a mutual goal, that is all. To prevent Amaris Yew from growing in power.”

She fell silent.

“Sonny the Smile… is not like other vampires.” She said slowly. “But I strongly encourage you to keep her at arm’s length, regardless. If the situation calls for it, she will turn on you in an instant. Be cautious.”

“Is she really that terrible?”

Soleil did not answer right away.

“That is a difficult question to answer.” She said finally. “Sonny the Smile is affiliated with the Brides of Dracula. They are untrustworthy at best, but they have actively taken great pains to suppress contemporary vampires and other threats to humanity. I, and others like me, have no desire to actively try to overthrow them.”

“However, I also do not want to openly side with them to destroy Amaris Yew.” Soleil continued. “There are many other factions in this world that may see me doing that as… a worrying sign for them, and would respond violently. We must be very cautious when dealing with Sonny the Smile… even if she has no intention of actually harming us.”

She lowered herself from the bar, pulling in a deep breath.

“You need to think about these things, Taylor.” She warned her. “We are dealing with monsters here.”

Taylor nodded, biting her lip nervously. Soleil, ever observant, was quick to comment on it.

“Don’t be nervous.’ She told her. “Once we save Mike everything should fall into place. Amaris will not stand her ground here without him.”

Being around Soleil was, in some ways, extremely enlightening. She had so many interesting things to tell her about vampire politics and the history of Amaris Yew. But whenever they parted ways, even for a little while, Taylor found herself extremely anxious and concerned. Every shadow was suspect, every corner could be hiding a monster. Soleil’s stories had both fascinated and frightened her. The world looked very different to her now.

“Do do do do do…”

She cast a look over her shoulder. Sonny the Smile was sitting under a nearby tree, seemingly napping against it. However her fingers were vaguely belting out soft, melodic notes on her ukulele… it was not the first time that she had done this.

This relaxed her, somewhat. Despite what Soleil had told her Taylor was getting the distinct impression that Sonny was keeping a close eye on her and what she was doing. She was always sitting some distance away from her, making music or playing with children. Taylor would never have suspected her to be a Vampire if she had not been told.

It was a little early for her to be home. She ignored Dad screaming at the TV as she headed up to her room. She kicked aside a beer can in front of her door and stepped inside.

Amaris Yew was standing just outside her window.

Taylor tilted her head to the side as the vampire glared at her through the glass. Her eyes were a bright, creepy red. Taylor stepped forward and drew the curtains shut before turning back around and flopping on her bed.

“She doesn’t scare easily, does she?”

Amaris did not turn around as Sonny came up behind her, smiling wildly. Dark clouds were beginning to cover what remained of the sun above them… light raindrops were already falling.

“No.” Amaris said stiffly. “She doesn’t.”

She stretched out an arm and gestured towards the lower half of the house. “Perhaps because of how she was raised.”

“Or perhaps her love for Mike Rose outweighs her fear of you.” Sonny said, almost musically.

Amaris gave her a look. “Get a job.”

The two stared at each other.

“The sun is going down.” Amaris noted. “You will be no match for me once it does.”

Sonny grinned at her. “Are you sure about that?” She asked. “You said something similar the last time we fought…”

Amaris raised her hand across her face and brushed her hair backward, staring at Sonny with a single, glaring eye. “I was not wrong.” She said. “You are no match for me.”

The rain began to fall more heavily. Patters of rain fell on the rooftops. The two continued to stare at each other.

Sonny suddenly spread her arms wide, as if she wanted to give her a hug. “Come home, Amaris.” She said. “Come willingly and I will not have to harm you. Our hands have always been held out to you- you can join us-“

“Death is better than subservience.” Amaris told her. “I would rather die than bend the knee to another.’

“That’s not what you told Mike last night.” Sonny said cheerfully. Amaris twitched.

“That’s it. You can die now.”

Lighting struck. The two clashed, Amaris going straight for the eyes with her fingers, which had shifted into beast like claws. Sonny narrowly avoided the first blow, but before she could lash out a counterattack Amaris had already brought her other hand towards her stomach.

“AH!”

Sonny flinched as Amaris twisted her hand cruelly. The claws dug further into her stomach.

“I cannot believe how stupid you are.” Amaris told her, as she kicked out at her.

Black blood spurted from her as Sonny fell backwads, off the side of the building and into the street. Amaris stood there for a while, relishing her victory, before stepping forward to get a better look at the body.

“Do do do do….”

She was staring up at her on the concrete, ukulele in hand, smiling up at her blissfully. Amaris narrowed her eyes before jumping downward, her leg outstretched.

She slammed her foot into Sonny’s stomach during her fall, causing her body to reel. She had, in fact, been aiming for the Ukulele, but Sonny had jerked it out of the way at the last minute.

Amaris stepped off of her, strutting around her glaring as Sonny lowered the instrument and continued playing.

“You can’t win a fight where you don’t hit back.” Amaris reminded her.

“Fighting, is, like, wrong man.”

Amaris bit back the urge to call her a hippie again. “Is that why you keep coming after me?”

“Not to fight you.” Sonny denied. “I… we want to be your friend.”

Amaris was skeptical. “Friends?” She fiddled with her hair. “You want the Brides and I to sit in a circle and smoke weed together?”

Sonny strummed her ukulele. “While I sing, of course.”

Amaris brought her leg upward and down again in a might ax kick. Sonny rolled out of the way, into the street, as Amaris’ foot slammed onto the concrete.

“There will be no singing.” Amaris declared, as lightning flashed over them again. Sonny climbed to her feet, holding the Ukulele to her chest protectively.

“No singing?” She repeated. “My, now that changes everything….”

She took a step back, away from her. “Never say we did not give you a chance, Amaris Yew.” Sonny told her. In a quick burst of light she was gone.

Amaris did not relax. She went home in a huff, her mind dwelling a little too much on Sonny. Amaris was not exactly sure what her

intentions were with attacking her before the sun had set. That had given Amaris an overwhelming advantage.

It was no use worrying about that now. Amaris thought to herself. For now the best thing to do was head home recover her strength.

"Oh Mike…"

She stepped into her house and looked around. She was pleased to see that Mike had cleaned up – Taylor had left quite a mess when she had let herself in. She found him laying in the living room, a blanket wrapped around him.

"Oh… Amaris…"

She kneeled down close to him. "Are you alright?" She asked, concerned, as she reached forward and touched his forehead. She could feel that something was wrong with him, but she knew that he would appreciate her asking.

"Sick…"

He pulled away and coughed. Amaris patted his arm, but inwardly she was annoyed. She could not prey on him while he was in this state. Doing so could kill him, which would ruin her plans for the long term.

"I'm sorry." Amaris told him quietly. "I hope you get better soon."

He spent the night there. Unwilling to waste any more energy on the town, Amaris chose to read and keep him company. It unsettled her, a little, having another person around her this way. She was usually completely alone while at home. Usually when she was around other people she felt stilted, uncomfortable. But at the moment she felt at ease and even a little peaceful.

Things wouldn't stay that way, though. Taylor and Sonny the Smile would come after them again. It was only a matter of time until it happened.

"Imagine all the people…"

Amaris looked up, towards the window. She had not opened it, and considering Mike's current condition, she doubted that he had either.

“You may say I’m a dreamer…”

Amaris’ expression darkened. She stood up and quickly walked to the window and peered outside. As she had thought, Sonny the Smile lay sprawled out on the sidewalk in front of the house, Ukulele in hand.

“I hope someday you’ll join us-“

Amaris reached for the vase next to her and threw it, as hard as she possibly could. It smashed against Sonny’s head and she lay sprawled against the sidewalk.

“Fuck off, we’re trying to sleep!” Amaris shouted at her.

She slammed the window shut in a huff, and for good measure put on some real music.

“As it went on the love became…. A field in a dream… that had once been real.”

…

When Taylor went to see Soleil the next day, she was surprised to find her waiting out in front.

“I’m officially discharged.” Soleil told her. She looked downright ecstatic by her usual stoic standard. Although she did not smile, she had a bright spring in her step. Taylor found herself genuinely happy for her.

“That’s great!”

She leaned forward and gave her a hug. Soleil, surprised, raised her arms around her as well.

“H-hey…” Soleil muttered as she pulled away. “What was that for?”

She looked somewhat uncomfortable. Taylor looked at her inquisitively.

“Is something wrong?”

Soleil shook her head. “No… nothing’s wrong.” She said quickly, as she stepped down the street. Taylor followed her, her eyes on the back of her head. She wondered whether Soleil was being honest.

“Uh, Soleil… What are you going to do about Amaris Yew?”

Soleil placed a hand against her face, putting on a thoughtful expression. “First back to my apartment.” She said. “Then we’ll talk about it.” Taylor nodded.

She had never been to Soleil’s place before. It was way smaller than she would have expected. A tiny, two room apartment filled to the brim with all sorts of weapons.

“How did you get all of this in here?” Taylor asked nervously, as she eyed the large scimitar on the wall apprehensively.

“Oh, magic…”

Taylor almost laughed.

“No, really.” Soleil elaborated. “Look at this.”

She gestured towards a large trunk sitting against the wall. She bent over and popped it open. Taylor’s mouth fell open.

There was nothing inside- nothing inside but an endless black space.

“It’s bottomless.” Soleil explained. “I can put anything in here and pull it out when I need it.

She reached in and pulled out a small bag.

“These are for holding weapons when I’m on the hunt.” She explained. “I just wrap it around my leg and…”

She did just that, and to Taylor’s amazement she pulled out a large handgun, far bigger than what should have been able to fit into the bag.

“Woah!” Taylor was impressed. Before she could even ask, Soleil had already procured another, and Taylor found herself a walking armory.

“Now you have to think about what you want when you draw something.” Soleil warned her. “And you can only take out what you yourself put in. It gets really difficult to keep track of what you’ve used and that takes practice.”

Taylor nodded along, and Soleil allowed her to practice. She was given several kinds of swords, guns, and a kind of exotic spear.

“Please don’t take too much at once.” Soleil said quickly, as she toyed around the spear. “Again, get used to using what you have first.”

Taylor nodded as she slid the spear back into the pouch. It was a lot easier than she had thought it would have been. The pouch was easily reached and big enough to slide a weapon in and out of.

“You are untrained, so I would ask you to only use weapons in emergencies.” Soleil told her. “Shooting Amaris Yew will not kill her, but she will probably stop and mock you for even trying.”

Taylor’s lips twitched. Soleil was completely serious, but the way she described Amaris was almost comical.

“Again, I simply want you to defend yourself.” Soleil went on. Don’t feel pressured to take on Amaris Yew yourself. Believe me, there are many who would gladly come to your aid if need be.” She paused. “Let’s have lunch.”

Soleil was a health nut. She lay out a vast spread of various fruits and vegetables, with a light serving of fresh meat. It didn’t taste bad or anything, but Taylor personally would have preferred a pizza.

They spoke little as they ate. Despite Taylor’s growing attachment to her, she was still a little intimidated by the foreign girl. She was incredibly pretty, and very strong. Although she felt that all of her questions would be answered, Taylor found herself hesitating a tad bit when posing them.

“Um, Soleil… do Vampire Hunters always work alone?”

“When hunting single targets, yes.” Soleil said. “There are so few of us, it’s generally very hard to get a group together.”

“Really?” Taylor asked, surprised. “How many of you are there, then?”

“Right now?” Soleil grimaced. “A few dozen.”

“In town?”

“In the world.”

Taylor gave her a surprised look. Soleil elaborated.

“There has never been a need for a large number of vampire hunters.” She explained. “People do not become vampires quickly. It is a process. As a result they have historically died in battle or been assassinated by political enemies before they gain enough power to need to be put down. You do not need specialized killers to hunt down Vampires until they become about a century old.” She paused. “Of course, there are always exceptions. Sonny the Smile has been a threat since she first appeared in the sixties.”

“She doesn’t attack people though, right?”

“No.” Soleil answered. “But as I said she is not our friend either. She has a history of… extremities.”

“Of what kind?”

“Protesting for causes, most commonly. She’s known to get carried away and attack people who disagree with her politics.”

“Uh, will she attack me…?”

“Doubtful.” Soleil told her. “She generally has problems with older, wealthier people. She probably sees you as an equal. Or at least someone to be protected.”

“She certainly doesn’t sound like an evil vampire.” Taylor commented. “An evil person wouldn’t protect a stranger, would they?”

“Even evil people have things they care about, Taylor.” Soleil told her. She was sympathetic, but firm. However Taylor was still not convinced.

“Look at it this way.” Soleil elaborated. “Much like how Amaris Yew has manipulated your friend Mike Rose into thinking that she is in love with him… Sonny the Smile is trying to manipulate you into thinking she is your friend.”

…

After Taylor had left, Soleil found herself alone in her apartment. She sat at her table, thinking deeply. She was no fool. She understood

that Taylor had, to some degree, put a little bit of trust into Sonny. In some ways that was understandable. But she could not help but feel a little upset with herself for not driving the warning home. If she were not careful, Taylor could become a liability rather than an asset…

A knock came at the door. Half expecting to be Taylor again, Soleil got to her feet and opened it.

"Hello." Sonny the Smile said cheerfully. Soleil immediately drew a gun and took step several steps back into the apartment.

"It's ready to fire, I'm warning you-"

"Put that thing way, Miss Blade." Sonny said politely. 'I'm just here to talk, ah, may I come in?"

Soleil snorted. "No."

Sonny came in anyway. Soleil flinched back, surprised. Vampires could not enter people's homes without permission.

"You haven't settled in yet." Sonny explained to her. "This isn't your home." She sat down at the table she had just vacated and looked approvingly at the remains of the fruit bowl she had set out.

"Very nice." She said. "I miss eating this stuff…"

She reached forward and popped a leftover grape into her mouth. She exposed her teeth as she chewed, and Soleil could make out the fruit disintegrating in her mouth due to the toxins in her body.

"Disgusting." Sonny sighed. "Perhaps my next freak mutation will lead me to develop the ability to eat real food again."

"You don't come here for my hospitality. What is it that you want?"

"I just wanted to talk." Sonny said. "About us."

"There is no us." Soleil had never met Sonny before in her life. Sonny laughed.

"How is your Mother?"

Mother may have crossed paths with her at one point. Soleil wasn't quite sure. "Very well. She is retired, but at her age that is to be

expected.”

“I’m very glad to hear that.” Sonny said, nodding along. She sounded genuine. “I always said that she works too hard.”

She was trying to be affable. Soleil wasn’t having any of it.

“What is it that you want?”

Sonny suddenly stood back up.

“The Brides of Dracula have decided to offer you an ultimatum.” She said. “They feel that, given the circumstances, we need to cooperate to eliminate the threat of Amaris Yew. Sooner, rather than later. They understand that you are reluctant to side with us publicly, and are willing to work with you to keep your involvement to a minimum.”

Soleil fell silent. “Go on.”

“It is well known that the Brides of Dracula and the Blades have had a similar goal for decades now. To eliminate Amaris Yew. It would not be seen as strange, if we were to… say, just happen to attack Amaris Yew around the same time.”

Soleil narrowed her eyes. “What do you mean?”

“I mean… we need to work together, but not really.” Sonny clarified. “I’ll go in, fight Amaris Yew, you swoop in and stake her, and then we all go home and watch Buffy to celebrate.”

“What is Buffy?”

“Have you looked in a mirror?”

“What?”

Sonny smiled. “Anyway.” She said. “I think we need to stop thinking about this all so formally. Once Amaris is dead, you can come after me if you like. If you kill me, that should stop any conspiracies about Amaris’ death. If I kill you, then- uh, I’ll be sure to send flowers to your Mother and Brother. He’s getting married, right? Who’s the lucky girl?”

“I have not met her.” Soleil said stiffly. Sonny chuckled.

“Just like your Mother.” She chided. “As I said before, she works too hard. And from what I’ve seen of you… you’re even worse.”

“You have no right to judge us.” Soleil said sharply.

“Is that right?” Sonny asked, as she stepped towards the door. “Well, then I’ll be sure to keep my opinions to myself going forward. We are enemies, remember! Don’t be afraid to stick it in when you see me next-“

Soleil slammed the door in place, scowling, before turning around to the table to clean up.

…

Soleil finally returned to school the following day. She somehow became even more popular following her injuries- she could hardly get away from people asking her questions.

“The boys sure like you, don’t they?” Taylor teased, as Soleil firmly rejected another boy’s offer to take her out to lunch.

“Well I don’t like them.” Soleil said haughtily, as she raised a piece of celery to her lips. “I have no time for such dalliances.”

Taylor giggled. Soleil glared at her. “What are you laughing at?”

“Nothing.” Taylor said quickly, raising her hands. “Nothing…”

They spoke a little in hushed tones. Although both had quite a few friends nearby, no one approached them due to the clear severity of the conversation. Taylor appreciated that.

“I am told that Mike is sick.” Soleil told her. “And Amaris hasn’t been coming to school.”

“Is that a bad sign?”

“Very.” Soleil said grimly. “She may have overused him. He may even be dead.”

Taylor’s eyes widened. The thought horrified her.

“But that is doubtful.” Soleil amended. “As I said before, she desperately wants to use Mike for her own ends. She would not kill him intentionally.”

“Should we…” Taylor paused. “Check up on him?” She fingered her hair, blushing a little. “I mean, we ARE his friends…”

“Yes, we should.” Soleil told her. “But I’m warning you now, Taylor. This could get very dangerous. Please be prepared for anything.”

It was like something out of a movie. Taylor thought to herself as she and Soleil stood in Soleil’s apartment, checking their weapons and equipment. They were getting ready for some seriously badass shit, and the mere thought of what was to come had gotten her heart pounding. Taylor found herself balking at the sheer amount of weapons that Soleil crammed into her pouch.

‘I like to be ready for anything.” Soleil explained, as she patted the bag on her leg. “Come.”

Taylor followed her out into the street, marveling at how the girl who had just spent the past half hour shoving sharp objects and guns into a bag on her thigh could look so ordinary while out in public.

Well, perhaps ordinary was a bit strong of a word… More than one guy tried to stop them to chat, but Soleil brushed them off. She brushed off more guys on her way to kill vampires than Taylor had even spoken to in the past year.

Taylor was almost feeling a little self conscious when they came to a stop in front of the home of Amaris Yew.

“Wouldn’t he be at his house?” Taylor asked. Soleil shook her head.

“No, he hasn’t been going home lately. His parents are worried sick-“

She paused. She tilted her head upward, staring at the upper window. Amaris Yew was staring down at them from a closed window.

“She’s so creepy.” Taylor complained. “The least she could do is come down and greet us properly-“

She almost shrieked as Amaris Yew tilted forward and slithered down the side of the building like a snake. Taylor recoiled as she snaked her way onto the concrete, and suddenly started coming right at them. Soleil stepped in between them protectively.

When she was within five feet of them, Amaris raised herself upward. She did not push herself up, like a normal person would. She simply seemed to be raise her body upward, into a standing position.

"My friends." Amaris said, as she spread her arms towards them. 'I am honored to have you here, at my estate. Welcome-"

Soleil raised a gun and shot her in between the eyes. She reeled, a little surprised, as the bullet embedded itself into her forehead.

"We are not interested in being your guests, Amaris Yew." Soleil said coldly, as Taylor gaped at her. "We have come to put an end to this."

Taylor nodded enthusiastically. "Y-yeah." She said. "Give back Mike!"

Amaris' eyes met hers, and she found herself flinching back slightly. "There's no room in his life for the likes of you." She said coldly. "As you well know."

Taylor gritted her teeth. "Why you-"

"Calm down, she is merely trying to aggravate you." Soleil said quickly. "Amaris Yew, where is Mike Rose?"

"He is just as you were told… sick and unable to leave the house." Amaris told her, as she reached up and pinched her fingers around the bullet lodged in her forehead. She pulled it out and held it in front of her. "He is not up to seeing visitors, I'm afraid. I'm going to have to ask you to leave."

Taylor stepped forward, a little brashly. "I still want to see him!" She protested, a little angrily. Amaris shook her head.

"I will see to him." She said, turning around. "Now, if that is all you came for-?"

Soleil stepped forward, getting into a fighting stance.

"… You never learn, do you?"

Amaris turned around and grimaced at them, her bright glaring red eyes froze Taylor's blood stone cold.

“I have no more patience for you, Blade.” Amaris said coldly. “Once Mike recovers I will take him back home with me. And then this struggle will come to a swift end.”

A thick, inscrutable fog began to fall around them. Taylor gasped, taking a step backward.

“Do not panic.” Soleil said sharply. “I’ll deal with her-“

Before either of them could move, the fog immediately subsided. Amaris Yew was gone.

Soleil lowered her gun inquisitively. “Did she really just run away?” She asked, almost a little incredulous.

“Yes.”

Soleil raised the gun again and pointed it at Sonny the Smile. She was standing on the bottom of a tree branch, staring down at them with wide eyes.

“We have her running scared.” Sonny crowed. “Keep it up!”

In a flash of light she was gone.

…

“I don’t like this.”

Taylor gave her a sympathetic look as they sat down at Soleil’s kitchen table. She seemed almost despondent. “Cheer up.” She said. “You’ll get a chance to fight her soon enough.”

Soleil shook her head. “I know that.” She insisted. “But… I am growing increasingly anxious at the way things are going. I am not sure how we can save Mike while he is staying in that house.”

“There has to be something we can do.” Taylor said, annoyed. “I just want to talk to him…” She clutched the Mark of the Wolves in her palm, wondering if she would soon have to use it.

“You will.” Soleil assured her. “You will have more than enough time to tell him how you feel after we free him from Amaris Yew.”

Taylor blushed. “D-don’t talk about that…”

They spoke a bit more about the issue. If Amaris did not let Mike leave until they left for Europe, they would have no opening to try and convince him to stay.

“We cannot let him leave.” Soleil said darkly. “No matter what it takes.”

It was all very exciting… and worrying. When Taylor left the apartment later that night she found her mind whirling with all of the possibilities, all the plans, everything she now knew about vampires and Amaris Yew.

“Mind if I walk you home?”

She was beginning to expect Sonny’s unexpected appearances. Taylor nodded briefly, and the two set off down the street together.

“Taylor…”

They stopped in the middle of the street. Sonny sounded unusually demure.

“Yes?”

“What is your relationship with Mike Rose?”

She turned away, not meeting her gaze. “Relationship?” She asked, almost scoffing. “I know him. That’s all.”

“Don’t lie to me about love.” Sonny told her flatly. “I know a thing or two about it.” Taylor slumped forward, shaking her head.

“Then why did you even ask?”

“Because we need to talk about this.” Sonny said. “Your feelings are the only thing that can stop Amaris Yew from ensnaring Mike Rose into her web.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You genuinely care for him.” Sonny elaborated. “You genuinely want what’s best for him and will fight for it. Even at great personal cost to yourself.” She licked her lips. “You are in love with him.”

Taylor could not speak for a second. It took her a while to find the words.

“So what if I am?” She snapped. “What does that have to do with anything?”

“You are genuine.” Sonny repeated, completely unphased. “You truly love him. Amaris Yew does not. If you were able to make him see that… he would leave her.”

Taylor bit back a raspy laugh.

“I’ve been trying to do that for thirteen years.” She said. “Yet the idiot can’t take a hint-“

“Confess.”

Taylor’s eyes widened and stepped away from her. “Confess?” She repeated. “Confess WHAT?”

“Tell him how you feel.” Sonny repeated. “Be open about how all of this is effecting you. Tell him you love him.” This last bit had a particular firmness to it.

“But I-“

“Amaris Yew is nothing but a parasite.” Sonny went on. “We all are. But you… you have your whole life ahead of you. And so does he. There is no future with Amaris Yew. You are the only person who can help him see that.” She stepped closer to her, smiling innocently, as she touched Taylor’s cheek.

“You are special.” She breathed. They stood like that for an awkward couple of seconds before she turned and disappeared into thin air.

Taylor felt emotionally drained by the time she came home and crawled into bed. She tried her hardest to ignore the thrashing music and moans coming from downstairs, but she still could not sleep. Her thoughts were on what Sonny had said to her.

If there was any chance she could save Mike… she would.

..

Sonny the Smile sure was taking her time. Much like the Witch Doctor had, she seemed to be trying to gather a team of allies to

combat her. Amaris did not mind this, in and of itself. However Sonny's insistence of sitting outside her house making music in between life or death fights was getting very annoying.

"Shut up!"

Sonny must have played every song John Lennon had every wrote over the past couple of days. Amaris had taken the liberty of buying an elegant pair of black earmuffs for use around the house. She found herself surprised at how much she liked them. Not only could she filter out contemporary music, she could also pretend to not hear Mike if he asked her for something. Plus they looked cute with her hair.

She wondered just when Sonny would strike for real, and just what she was up to. Surely she was speaking to Soleil. And Taylor, the girl who had stolen the Mark of the Wolves. But could there be more? Amaris doubted it. If anything what Sonny already had was a bit overkill. The Brides could not afford overkill. Their position in world politics was tenuous enough as it was without international incidents to their name.

Amaris stood in the kitchen, cooking a meal for Mike. Her head bent over, she found herself thinking of what was to come.

"Sonny… your head will be next."

Chapter 11

"Amaris!"

Mike sat off the couch, blinking tiredly. Over the past few days he had slowly been regaining his strength. He was feeling a bit better, stronger. He could even get out of bed now.

"Mike…"

Amaris had walked in on him sitting up out of the couch. Instantly she was by his side, touching his sides, his hair, his face… the touch of her fingers made him tingle.

"You're feeling better!" She chirped cheerfully, as she leaned in and kissed his forehead. "Glad to hear it. I was just making you

something to eat… Are you feeling up to it?”

Mike nodded. Amaris smiled warmly at him and helped him to his feet. She steadied him a little as they stepped into the kitchen.

“Here…”

She did not leave his side as they sat down at the table. Two chairs pulled themselves out from under the table and positioned themselves right next to each other. One was positioned rather oddly- it seemed to be closer to the other chair than it was to the table.

They sat down, and Amaris, biting her lip, scooted even closer to him as the pan on the stove flipped.

“I hope you don’t mind something nutrient filled.” Amaris told him. “You need your health back.”

“No… that sounds great.” Mike said, as a jug of milk poured itself into a glass. Amaris smiled, pressing her hand against his arm as the plate and silverware set itself in front of him.

The food was delicious as always, but it was a little hard to concentrate on his food. Amaris was sitting next to him, watching his every move intently.

“What is it?” He asked.

“What is what?”

“Why are you so close to me?”

“I’m making sure you’re healthy. Don’t ask questions.”

Don’t ask questions… He would try to remember that.

Amaris was practically petting him as he ate. She did not speak, they simply sat in silence.

“Mike.”

He set down the fork. He was not able to eat much. “Yeah?”

“The future scares me.”

Mike gave her a surprised look, unable to believe his ears. Amaris smiled at him. It was a much sadder smile than he was used to seeing from her.

“What?” He asked blankly. It took him a moment to recall that she had asked him to not ask questions, and he hastily amended his statement. “There’s nothing to be scared of.”

Amaris gave a small laugh. It sounded almost nervous. “You are naïve. And very young.” She leaned in closer to him, placing her hands on his leg for balance. “That’s what I’ve grown to love about you.”

They stared at each other. Mike’s heart was beating fiercely in his chest. He did not know what to do or say.

“You may think of me as being untouchable.” Amaris whispered. “You may think of me as being great. But in the end I will die alone.”

“Amaris…”

She pulled away from him and stood up, her long black hair completely obscuring her face.

“I’m sorry.” She told him tearfully before turning and hurriedly stepping out of the room. Mike stood up, open mouthed, as the door slammed shut behind her.

“Wait-“

Amaris raised her head and smiled to herself. Taking a minute to compose herself, she stepped out into the street.

…

“Today’s your last chance.”

Taylor jumped. Sonny had caught her by surprise.

“Oh good morning.” Taylor said quickly, as she shouldered her bag. “Uh, my last chance at WHAT?”

“Amaris Yew is not coming back to your school.”

Taylor blinked. “She’s doing what now?”

“She is already making plans to take Mike and flee to Europe.” Sonny told her. “You have known this for some time. But today is the day she plans to make him see things her way.”

Taylor’s jaw tightened.

“What should I do?”

“Forget everything else.” Sonny advised her. “Go to him.”

Taylor did not hesitate. She dropped her bag and ran off down the street. Sonny watched her go, smiling serenely, before stepping forward. A bright flash of light overtook her, and a bright yellow cat was standing in her place. It followed behind at a leisurely pace.

“Mike!”

She came to a stop outside of Amaris Yew’s house. She did not hesitate: She reached into the pouch around her leg and reached for the gun.

She raised it above her head and threw it. It smashed into the window and broke it into pieces.

“Mike!” She screamed again. “Where are you?”

She was extremely agitated, she looked all around the house for any signs of movement, but there was nothing. Nothing at all.

Nothing except the sound of someone clapping from above.

Her eyes tilted upward. There, standing above her, on the very top of the highest spire on the building, stood Amaris Yew. She stood high above her, staring down at her with a harsh, red gaze as she clapped.

“Finally come to challenge me, have you?”

Amaris floated upward, off of her impossible perch and slowly floated downward, her eyes intently fixed on Taylor all the while. Taylor stood her ground, trying to hold back her mounting panic, as Amaris’ heels clicked onto the concrete in front of her house.

“Well?” Amari asked, spreading her arms wide. “Would you like me to take a message?”

“Where is he?” Taylor demanded, as she took a threatening step closer to her. Amaris tilted her head to the side, considering her. Her eyes flickered to the large yellow cat watching them from the other side of the street. It yawned, as if bored.

“He?” Amaris repeated. “You need to be more specific…”

“I want to speak to Mike!” Taylor demanded. She reached into her bag and brought out a spear. She held it out before her, rather clumsily, and brandished it at her. Amaris was unimpressed.

“Greater women than you have died by getting on my bad side.” Amaris said. “None of them were half as annoying, and ALL of them had more of a chance with Mike than you do.”

Taylor screamed and charged forward. It happened extremely quickly. Amaris swatted the weapon away with her hand, almost lazily, and darted forward. Taylor cried out as the same hand wrapped around her throat, and lifted her off the ground. The spear clanked harmlessly at their feet.

“I don’t even need to lay a hand on you to kill you.” Amaris whispered, as the yellow cat moved across the street and passed them. “You have no idea just what I could do to you.”

Taylor kicked out at her, weakly, as the grip around her neck tightened.

The cat leapt up to the broken window and trotted inside the house. It avoided the glass and made its way further inside. It pushed open the door the kitchen and found Mike sitting there, staring at an empty plate.

“Mreow.”

Mike looked up, startled, as the cat leapt up onto the table and stepped all over the plate, knocking over the glass as it did.

“Hey-“

The cat leapt off the table as Mike steadied the glass. It sat and stared at him intently, before turning to step back out of the room.

Mike followed it, completely bemused. He had never known Amaris to keep a cat.

The cat leapt onto the broken windowsill and stared at him. Mike stepped across the broken glass and stood there in front of the window.

“Amaris…?”

She was standing in the street in front of him, holding aloft a girl above her head. That figure looked very familiar…

“Taylor…?”

He leaned forward, placing his hands on the windowsill. “What are you-“

“She came for you.”

Mike gave a surprised look towards the cat, as it stepped forward, leaping back down back into the grass. Had it just spoke? Mike felt a strange sort of desire to speak with Taylor come over him. She did not deserve this… Amaris should not be doing this!

Mike turned and stepped out into the hallway and out into the street.

“Amaris!”

She did not turn around.

“Is something the matter, My Love?” She asked, her voice as soft and friendly as ever. Her hand was still clutched tightly around Taylor’s neck, who was growing increasingly white.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m taking care of another pest.” Amaris said, as Taylor let out another moan of pain.

“Stop!”

Amaris around to face him. “Stop?” She repeated. She sounded almost shocked. “Are you…. telling me what to do?”

“Stop!” Mike repeated, his mouth suddenly feeling very, very dry as she started at him. The expression on Amaris’ face became almost inhuman.

Amaris narrowed her eyes. “What…?”

“Stop- stop hurting her!” Mike demanded, his voice becoming shrill and high pitched. Amaris stared at him.

“After everything I’ve done for you…” She murmured, her eyes became red and bestial. “This is how you treat me?”

Mike froze. “No, I didn’t mean-“
He paused, as his eyes focused on Taylor struggling. He steeled himself.

“Yes!” He snapped forcefully. “Drop her!”

“As you wish.” She said, her voice ice cold.

She brought Taylor around and dropped her at her feet. Taylor gasped for breath, crawling along the concrete towards Mike. He took several steps towards her, reaching out towards her.

Amaris raised her leg and brought it down on Taylor’s skull. She did not even have time to scream as her heel crushed her skull, caving it in completely. . Mike stared, horrified, as Amaris twisted cruelly. Taylor’s arm flopped uselessly onto the sidewalk.

“Never.” Amaris whispered. “Tell me what to do.”

She pulled back. Taylor’s head lifted upward a little before the heel slid neatly out of her head. It fell back down onto the concrete with a sickening crunch. She was not moving.

“Taylor!”

Amaris watched as Mike rushed down next to her. Her eyes flickered upward, where the Yellow cat was watching. Amaris stared back intently, her eyes narrowed.

Mike kneeled down and wrapped his arms around Taylor. A sob raised in his throat. She was dead.

The cat turned and walked away, Amaris followed it with her eyes, and after a moment's consideration stepped after it.

"Where are you going?" Mike asked her. "Where-"

"Stay here." Amaris said, without even answering his question. "And WAIT."

"No-"

Amaris turned and stared. Her eyes were a bright, evil red. Mike felt his body seize up, and he collapsed, right on top of the girl who had given her life to try and save him.

The cat was waiting for her at the end of the street. It turned and transformed into a large yellow bird and soared off. Amaris was quick to follow it, taking the shape of a Raven to fly after it.

"Caw!"

She took off, and for several minutes they dived and weaved among each other. Being a much bigger bird, Amaris hoped to overpower her enemy. But to no avail. The small yellow bird darted in between her dives and jabs, although it made no move to strike back.

It was a while before it did anything other than evade her It took a long hard dive downward, and Amaris immediately followed it.

The bird landed, and almost immediately shifted back into dirty haired Sonny the Smile. Amaris shifted back before she even hit the ground. Her heels slammed into the rocks.

She stood and stared at Sonny. Sonny smiled at her, waving her hand behind her. Amaris followed her gaze, her eyes narrowed. They were standing at the edge of a beach. Not a particularly large or beautiful one, but a beach all the same.

"I thought it was best to take you here." Sonny said wistfully, as she wrapped one arm around herself. "I remember…when I was very young, I always found it fascinating how much you loved the beach."

Amaris said nothing. Sonny turned to face the water, her head bowed.

“I thought it so funny.” She said aloud. “How a creature so closely associated with the dark and night could love the sand and sun so much.”

“For ages mankind has known the grace and beauty of fire. And yet it was also feared.” Amaris placed her hand on her chin, bending her head. “My love for the beach is no different.” She whispered. “Even when the sun could still burn me… I loved and appreciated it for what it was.” She smiled. “I like to think it is no different to how modern people admire other planets.”

Sonny nodded. “I truly hate to kill you, Amaris Yew.” She said quietly. “But it must be done. I will not risk another war. I can’t.”

“You are trying to manipulate me.” Amaris said, as she got into a fighting position. “But it will not work. I have no reservations about killing you. You mean nothing to me.”

Sonny giggled. “Your apathy towards others… it will lead to your downfall.” She brandished her arms in an awkward looking stance. “Even if I die here… you have already lost.”

“Hmph.” Amaris snorted. “We shall see about that.”

She spread her arms wide. The sand on the beach beside them began to swirl around them, in a vast whirl wind. Specs of sand slammed into their clothes, faces, and hair as they stood, staring at each other. Soon the sand became so intense that both of them became completely obscured by it.

“Rah!”

Sonny leapt forward blindly, swinging at where she had been standing. Amaris was way ahead of her- she was floating just above. She came down, hard, with a mighty kick into the back of her head. She lay sprawled on the ground, squirming like a worm. Amaris slammed her heel into her head again. Sonny quickly rolled around and bit her leg.

“What are you, a dog?”

Amaris reached down and smacked her aside with the back of her hand. Sonny again went sprawling. The sand swirled around them as Amaris stepped towards her.

"You lured me out here on your own terms only to get your skinny little ass kicked."

Amaris kicked out again, intending to smash her foot against Sonny's, but again she rolled out of the way just in time.

"Patience, Amaris." She chided, as she got on all fours and then pushed herself up into a sort of awkward leap to regain her footing. "This fight is only just beginning."

"I'm not going to let you run away again." Amaris told her flatly. "It would best for your health to stop being so smug."

Sonny giggled again. "Smug? SMUG? You bite your tongue. I am the very face of modesty… unlike you.  Tell me… did you ever suck Mike's blood through his-"

Amaris raced towards her, at supernatural speed, and punched her across the face. Sonny cried out in pain as she went sprawling out into the beach proper. She lay there in the sand as Amaris lowered her fist and stepped towards her.

Sonny leapt up again, flying a little bit before getting back on her feet.

"Is this the best you can do?" Amaris asked disparagingly. The sand at their feet began to shift about unnaturally. Sonny began to sink in place, being dragged deeper and deeper into the ground. Sonny was laughing.

"Wheeee-"

"It's over." Amaris said coldly, once Sonny was enveloped almost completely. Only her head remained above the surface. Amaris closed her fist.

Suddenly a loud CRUNCH filled the air. Sonny's head, still smiling widely, fell to the side. Amaris raised her hand, and Sonny's crushed body slowly slid back out.

She stared at it for a while, trying to rationalize Sonny's behavior. She was insane, but not suicidal.

Sonny twitched.

"The sun's still out, love."

Amaris readied herself as Sonny's broken body righted itself. Splintered bones dug into the sand, propping her upward into a sitting position. She was still smiling.

Amaris could see that her bones were already mending. "Your powers have increased over the years, then." She noted. Sonny slowly got to her feet, her bones rapidly folding themselves back into her body. "You heal as long as the sun is out."

"And unfortunately for you, we have plenty of sunlight left." Sonny rasped, as the last patch of skin closed over her wounds. She now looked completely unblemished.

"A shame that the sun doesn't stop you from being ugly." Amaris noted, as the two took fighting positions. Sonny laughed again.

"At least I don't age!"

Amaris went in for another sharp blow across the face, but this time Sonny dove out of the way, her arms hanging limply out of her side. Amaris went for several more jabs around the body, but Sonny kept darting out of the way. She was incredibly fast, but made no attempt at striking back.

"Why do you not fight?"

"I'm a pacifist, man."

Amaris scoffed.

"No really." Sonny said, as she created more distance between them. "I'm being serious!"

"If you were honest, you would never have tried to duel me to begin with." Amaris said coldly. Sonny laughed yet again.

"I want to be your friend." Sonny confessed. "I always have. But if you stand in the way of world peace… I have no choice but to fight."

“How noble of you, setting aside your values to accomplish the will of your masters.”

Amaris ran forward again, faster than before, and once again struck at Sonny’s face. She sidestepped, a little too carefree, and danced out of the way.

“It ends today, Amaris Yew!” She crowed, as she came to a stop, once again, some distance away from her. Amaris did not hesitate- she came after her again. This time the sand at Sonny’s feet began to shift about. It sprung upward, the sand becoming much harder and compact as it wrapped around Sonny’s leg.

She could not move in time- Amaris slammed her fist against her jaw, bending her over backwards. The tightly wound brace of sand around her legs preventing her from falling. She hung there, in a sort of awkward bridge position, as Amaris aggressively moved in over her.

“Ha!”

She chopped Sonny’s stomach. She recoiled in pain, spitting out vampire acid as she laughed and laughed.

“Shut up!”

Amaris struck her across the face, with enough force to shatter concrete. Sonny’s face shattered, the bones in her lower jaw snapped completely off from the upper one. It hung there, sort of slack jawed in front of her. A strange gurgling sound was still coming from her, but it was not pained.

“Ag agh agh agh gah…’

The jaw reformed before her very eyes.

“Ha ha ha ha ha…”

Amaris almost broke her jaw again. Instead she turned away, releasing Sonny from her bonds. She fell to the ground in a heap.

“What would it take to kill you?” Amaris asked, almost conversationally. “The boyfriend will worry if I take until nightfall…”

“Oh, as if you care.” Sonny said, surprisingly disparagingly, as she staggered to her feet. She rubbed her lip with the back of her hand, wiping away the drool. “It’s a little too late for you to act as if you care about what young Mike Rose thinks…”

“I do care.” Amaris told her, a little belligerently. Sonny gave her a dark look.

Amaris tilted her head to the side, considering her opponent.

“Mike is instrumental to my plans.” She said. “I will use every last drop of blood I can take from him until I have what I want.”

Sonny was not smiling anymore. Amaris continued.

“He means nothing to me.” She went on. “He is just a boy who can help me achieve my dream.” She smiled, showing off her perfect white teeth. “And he is more than happy to do so.”

“You are cruel.” Sonny whispered.

Amaris brushed her hair behind her shoulders with her hands, staring at her. “And Beautiful.” She said. “Believe me.”

Sonny glared at her. A bright yellow aura began to emanate from her. Amaris stared her down coolly.

“Why you-“

The bright light began to escalate, until Sonny was not even visible. Amaris closed her eyes and got into a fighting position.

Sonny charged her again and went for the eyes with her fingers. Amaris grabbed her hand and twisted, throwing her to the ground. Sonny spun in midair, but before she hit the sand she darted backward in mid air, bending her the wrong way.

CRACK

She broke her own arm to do it , but Amaris was pushed off balance. Sonny came back around and pounced on her.

Raising her good hand, she clobbered her across the face as her broken arm hung limply at her side. Amaris snarled, baring her fangs as she tried to bite her, but Sonny managed to awkwardly slap her

down with her already healing arm before hitting her properly with her hand.

Amaris tried to reach out and crush her neck, but to no avail. The speed and force of her blows was too much to handle. Amaris had no choice. She shifted back into her mist like form and drifted through her fingers. She floated upward before reforming.

“Ha!”

Amaris winced as Sonny hit her across the face. She went tumbling back to the ground, although thankfully she managed to land on her feet. Amaris struck out at Sonny again, who deflected the attack. Amaris opened her eyes, and then quickly shut them again. The bright, overwhelming light was too much to bare.

The two fighters paused for a while, trying to decide on their next move.

“Even while blinded, I am by far your better.” Amaris told her.

“Not a better person.”

Amaris sensed Sonny coming for her again, and once again struck out her fist. Sonny cried as the blow sent her straight to the ground.

“You are no match for me.” Amaris told her. “You-“

She cried out in surprise as something wrapped around her neck. “Oops!” Sonny told her, as she pulled her arm back. Amaris cried out in surprise as she fell on top of Sonny, only to be brutally kicked mid fall.

Amaris recoiled. Not only because of the blow, but because of the intense light. She could feel her skin starting to wither away and crack under the combined pressure of the sun above and Sonny the Smile.

“Agh!”

She had to pull away. Sonny leapt to her feet, spreading her arms wide as Amaris raised her arms to block off the light. Despite her best efforts, she was beginning to be overpowered.

“What’s wrong?” Sonny asked innocently, as she stepped closer to her, her arms raised. “Are you alright? Here, let me take a look at you…?”

Amaris screamed in pain as Sonny wrapped her arms around her in a gentle embrace. Large cracks ran up and down her skin and face. Amaris tried to push Sonny off of her, but she merely tightened the embrace.

“Shhh…” Sonny whispered, as she brushed Amaris’ hair, which was quickly turning a light shade of gray. “It’s okay… “

She pulled backward, and Amaris was dragged along the beach back into the grass. She turned them around, and Amaris looked up to see the vast expanse of beach in front of them.

“There may be more beautiful beaches in this world.” Sonny whispered. “But that does not make it any less special.”

Amaris let out a dry sob as she gently twisted her feet into the dirt. Sonny tightened her grip on her, clearly anticipating her to try and make a break for it.

“You have lived a beautiful life, Amaris Yew.” She said. “Beautiful.”

Amaris chuckled.

“You have no idea just how cruel I can be.” She rasped. She twisted her foot even further into the dirt. Already thin tendrils were sprouting from her foot and into the ground. Sonny did not seem to notice that something was horribly wrong.

Amaris twisted. Her entire body hardened and lengthened. Sonny pulled away, a little taken aback, but she was unable to move. Wood was already wrapping around them, entrapping them both on that spot. Amaris spun around, morphing her body into thick, gnarled bark.

Sonny cried as she was pulled into Amaris’ new shape. The dark, brooding tree stood tall compared to everything surrounded it. It looked very out of place there, next to the beach.

“Ha ha ha…”

Amaris pulled herself from the bark and crawled down the side of the tree like a lizard. She reached the hole that Sonny was staring out of. For the first time she looked frightened. The strange glow that had given her that edge over her was fading. She was completely bound within the tree. Unable to move and, more importantly, unable to collect sunlight.

"It has been many years since I had the chance to use this." Amaris purred, almost sensually, as she ran her hands across the bark. "Most of my enemies are not naïve enough to allow themselves to be taken in this way."

She licked her lips wildly as the small hole slowly began to shut. She waited a while, tapping on the tree with her palm, before deciding on how best to proceed.

"You are entrapped in an Amorous Yew… An organism of my own deisgn. It is a plant that feeds off of all your most treasured memories and happiest moments, until there is nothing left but coldness and despair."

Amaris floated off of the tee and onto the ground, with her back to the tree. She smiled to herself as she imagined the tree growing several, large stakes and impaling Sonny. Through the eyes, up the rectum, through the mouth.

The tree shifted in place, and a strange pained noise came from it. And then there was silence.

Amaris laughed. "Now that I think of it, it is rather a fitting end for you, to spend eternity dying alone within that tree. She said. "You can rot there as I wage war against your masters."

Another strange gurgling sound came from the tree, but Amaris knew it was futile. She ignored it. She floated upward gently, reveling in her victory, before heading home.

…

"No…"

Soleil bent her head over Taylor's body, unable to believe her eyes. She had come here alone after all. And in the end she had paid the price.

Soleil stared at it for a while, trying to fight down her own emotions. Now was not the time to panic. No, Taylor had come her for a reason, and that reason was-

"Mike."

She turned to the house, wondering whether he was somewhere in there. She felt a strong sense of foreboding. If Taylor had ended up like this… had Mike…?

She shouldn't jump to conclusions. She told herself sharply. If Mike had done this… she would punish him. If he was an innocent, she would do everything in her power to protect him.

"Is anyone here?"

A man stepped out from a nearby house. Soleil watched him as he walked up to his mailbox, grabbed his mail, and then stepped back inside. Amaris had the entire neighborhood hypnotized, clearly. They likely weren't even aware that anything had happened. Soleil thought it best not to get the neighbors involved. Her priority was finding Mike.

She called an ambulance to deal with Taylor's body and stepped up to the house. She kicked down the door and strode inside.

The entire place was a mess. Pictures and furniture were tossed all over the room in a fit of rage. Soleil instinctively let her experience take over.

"Is anyone there?" She demanded, of the darkness. "Anyone?"

There was no answer. Feeling a bit perturbed, Soleil stepped through the hall and into the kitchen. Again, plenty of objects were out of place, but there was no obvious sign of battle.

She took to the stairs, and climbed upward to the next floor. This hall was a bit clearer. One side was clearly decimated and torn apart.

The other untouched. She stepped down the decimated half. The carnage stopped at a single closed door.

Soleil opened it.

She found Mike curled up in a ball on his bed, whimpering.

“Taylor…”

“I…

L

O

V

E

Amaris… Yew…”

He was shivering, and clutching his head. Soleil recognized the symptoms well. They were those of someone who was desperately fighting against the effects of hypnotism.

“Sir…”

She quickly came forward and kneeled down next to his bed. She was no professional, far from it, but she had learned basic Nursing for vampire victims in her training. “I’m going to have to ask you to calm down and relax.” She said. “Give in to your feelings. You are in safe hands.”

Mike did not respond at first. Soleil kept speaking in that same, pleasant tone.

“You have nothing to fear.” She promised him. “Whatever it is she has bid you to do… I will help you overcome it. But try your best to relax.”

She paused, before starting again in the same, pleasant voice. It took some doing, but after ten minutes or so he did noticeably shake a little less. Another couple of minutes and his arms lay on limp at his sides.

“That’s it.” Soleil cooed. “Let yourself rest for a moment.”

Mike nodded. Soleil was relived to see that he was beginning to show real signs of response. “Please tell me what happened to you.” She already had a very good idea, but it was always a good idea to ask the victim what they thought of their situation.

“I…” He shifted about uncomfortably in bed.

“Do not try to force it.” Soleil commanded. “Please take one step at a time.”

“Amaris…” Mike whispered, clearly a little distraught. “How…. Could she do that to Taylor…?”

And then he burst into tears. Soleil bowed her head, trying to hide her own emotions. Taylor, her only confidant in this case, did not deserve to die this way. But she had gotten herself involved for a reason. She wanted to help Mike. She was not here to do it, but Soleil was.

“Please try to calm yourself.” She told him. “You will not be doing yourself any favors by-“

“What do YOU KNOW?”

Soleil pulled back surprised as Mike jolted out of bed. His eyes were a horrible, bloodshot red and his entire face was in tears. He advanced upon her.

“She’s DEAD!” He cried. “SHE’S DEAD, SHE’S-“

“Please calm yourself.” Soleil told him. “You are still not of sound mind-“

“I DON’T WANT TO BE MYSELF. I LET THIS HAPPEN.”

“No!” Soleil said, a little too sharply. “You are not-“

He lunged for her. Soleil, unwilling to defend herself against him, was pushed up against the wall. She could easily have punched him away with her supernatural strength, but she allowed herself to be manhandled by him.

“It’s my fault! My fault… My fault…”

“Mike-“

Before she could even get all of the words out, Amaris Yew walked into the room.

“Hey.” She said cheerfully. She looked exhausted, but somehow very pleased with herself. Soleil shot her a horrified look. Mike did not turn to look at her as she slithered into the bed.

“Mike…?” She asked. “Could… we do it one more time? Before we leave?”

It was like Soleil wasn’t even in the room. Amaris completely ignored her as she popped off her heels with a sigh, sending them falling to the floor. Mike loosened his grip on Soleil to turn and stare at her.

“Well?” Amaris asked impatiently. “Come hither. Chop chop. Let’s do it. Um. I want to have fun. Fuck.” Mike stared at her coldly.

“No.”

The word came out with no difficult whatsoever. Soleil slid out from against the wall to stand beside him to get a better look at Amaris’ shocked expression.

“No?” She repeated. “What do you MEAN no?”

“No.” Mike repeated. “No no no no no no no…”

Soleil readied herself as one of Amaris’ heels shot across the room and clobbered him in the head. He fell to his knees, a trickle of blood running down his forehead. Amaris drooled.

“That’s more like it…” She purred. She slid off the bed and approached him. Soleil immediately stepped between them, glaring at her.

“You want to come too?” Amaris asked, surprised. “Why Soleil. That’s so NAUGHTY.”

“This farce is over, Amaris Yew.” Soleil told her quietly. “You will die here tonight.”

Amaris chuckled.

“Oh, Sonny the Smile told me the same thing, before I impaled her at twelve different angles and left her body to rot.” Amaris said. “You

and she are really not so different, Soleil."

"I will succeed where she has failed." Soleil declared. "I will-"

Amaris was not paying attention. "Mike." She implored. "My love. Why must you do this to me?"

"You killed Taylor." Mike told her. Soleil was horrified to see that he had that same, dry monotone voice that typically came with being put under hypnosis. "And… I… don't trust you anymore."

"It was an accident." Amaris stressed. "I… didn't want to do it. Truly. But Taylor was working with Sonny the Smile and Soleil Blade to tear us apart, Mike. I…" She gave him a cute look. "I cannot imagine my life without you anymore."

He took a step closer to her. She smiled reassuringly as she raised her arms towards him.

"Lie." Mike breathed. "All… lies…" Amaris' eyes flashed.

"Oh fuck this."

Mike collapsed at her feet. Soleil leapt forward, intent on checking him for damage, but Amaris was already on top of her. Amaris slammed her into the wall, shattering through it. They rolled along the hallway, smacking each other with their fists. Amaris kept trying to go in for desperate bites, but Soleil managed to avoid them all.

The two broke apart and scrambled to their feet, glaring at each other. Soleil already had a stake in her hand.

"Getting a little ahead of ourselves, aren't we?" Amaris purred, as she eyed the stake warily. "Our battle hasn't even begun."

"It will end." Soleil said simply, before raising the stake threateningly. Amaris smiled winningly at her. Before suddenly throwing herself off the stairs.

"Raaaaargh!"

Soleil had not been expecting that. She watched as Amaris rolled downward, head over heels, slamming into things as she went. She followed downward, her weapon raised.

The door burst open.

“What-“

The police officer looked up at Soleil wit horror before casting a glance down at Amaris on the floor. Soleil quickly lowered her weapon, but it was already too late.

BLAM BLAM.

Soleil lurched forward as the bullets slammed into her chest and she fell, falling face first down onto the stairwell. She rolled down, just as Amaris did before her, and came to a stop near where Amaris’ body lay.

They came face to face. They stared at each other. Soleil gurgled out in pain and shock as Amaris smiled widely at her. The expression faded as the officer stepped into the room.

“Don’t move!” He said, pointing the weapon at Soleil. “You’re under arrest!”

More people were coming into the room. Soleil could feel her vision fading as someone kneeled down next to them and began checking her. Amaris was quickly pulled from the scene and out into the street.

She had been tricked. Soleil realized in horror. Amaris had sensed the police arriving outside and taken advantage of the situation.

“M-Mike…”

“Don’t talk.” The person tending to her said quickly. “You’ll make it worse.” Soleil nodded, as she allowed the woman to tend to her wound.

“Thank you…”

The woman gave her a weird look. Soleil quickly saw this as an opportunity.

“There is… someone upstairs.”

“What?”

“Upstairs…”

The woman quickly gestured for one of the co-workers to come to her. Soleil sighed and laid her head backward.

“Do not let the girl out of your sight.” She murmured. Minutes passed. She tried her best to relax and allowed the wound to be treated.

“No one is there.”

Soleil flinched. “What?” She repeated. “Are you sure?”

“I am sure.” The officer told her, somewhat impatiently. Soleil thought it kind of odd.

“Where is Amaris Yew?”

“I don’t know.”

The woman tended her shrieked as Soleil sat up. She placed a hand on her chest wound. When she pulled away the bullet was clenched firmly in her hand. No wound was in sight.

“What are you-?”

“A Vampire Hunter.” Soleil told them calmly. “Your people interfered in my work. She has escaped.” She began to sit up, but before she could get anywhere the officer rose his weapon.

“Don’t move!” Soleil cast a look at the officer.

“Please don’t make me hurt you.” She said quietly. “Where did she go?”

“What is she talking about?” The nurse demanded, looking between the two of them. “Wha-“

Soleil ignored her. She shakily got up to her feet. The paramedic stared at her, open mouthed. “How-“

“I’m tougher than most people.” Soleil told her shortly. The Officer raised his gun at her again.

“You’re under arrest!”

Soleil ignored him and stepped towards the door. The paramedic stared at her openmouthed as the officer advanced, brandishing a

weapon.

Soleil whirled upon him, grabbing his wrist and twisting. Despite his size he feel to the floor, screaming in pain.

“My apologies.” Soleil said shortly, before stepping back outside.

She closed the door behind her and headed for the garage. If Amaris had gone and she had managed to abduct Mike… then there was no question. She was on the way to Europe.

“Hey you!”

She ignored the shout behind her as she reached for the garage door and yanked it open. The lock holding it in place snapped as it raised upward.

It was generally pretty clean and tidy. Amaris did not even own a car, but there was a motorcycle. Soleil recognized it immediately. It had belonged to Gloria. Amaris must have taken it as a trophy.

The cops stepped around the corner, guns raised as she checked the helmet. Amaris, she was thankful to see, had gotten a replacement fit for a human head rather than that of a dinosaur.

“Freeze!”

“Step away from the motorcycle!”

Amaris had to be fleeing the country. And in her condition she would not dare to do so on her own power. No… she would rely on someone else. Something reliable.

Like an airplane.

The motorcycle roared to life. The cops readied their weapons as Soleil slipped on the helmet, covering her face completely.

“Excuse me.” She said shortly, as she shot forward.

They backed away in fear as she shot forward, down the driveway and out into the street. She twirled around, trying to get her bearings, as the police readied their weapons again.

BLAM BLAM

She was off, down the street. Already the police were in their cars, but Soleil paid them no mind. The bike was very quick. The only question now was whether or not it was quick enough.

## Chapter 12

"Two please."

The ticket attendant looked up, surprised at the rather beaten down looking girl in front of her. "Are you alright?" She asked, horrified. The long, black haired girl seemed to be covered in all matter of bumps and bruises. The girl smiled meekly at her.

"Y-yes?" She offered, a little meekly. "Um, is something wrong?"

The attendant's eyes flickered over to her companion, a sullen looking young man who looked as if he did not want to be there. "I don't know. Is there?" She was concerned.

The girl looked down. "No." She said, sounding a little distant. "Nothing's wrong."

They made the transaction and then the girl said their goodbyes. The attendant watched them go, a little unsettled. She wondered whether she should report them, but decided against it. Perhaps she was simply overthinking things. She would keep a close eye on them. If the boy really was hitting her, she would do everything in her power to get her away from him.

Amaris smiled at Mike as they found their seats in the waiting room and sat down. "Well?" She asked coyly. "Here we are. Going to Europe with nothing but the clothes on our backs." She lay her head on his shoulder. "Better men than you would kill for this opportunity."

"I want to go home."

Amaris' smile did not fade.

"Home is where the heart is." She told him. "And your heart belongs to me."

She reached forward and gently peeled down his jacket to look down at the brown collar wrapped around his neck. "You will serve me for the rest of your natural life." She told him.

“This is wrong-“

“This is right.” Amaris corrected him, as she gently ran her hand up his neck. “Because I’m stronger than you.” She spoke as if that settled the matter. Mike could not bring himself to argue. He couldn’t.

“We will have a wonderful time in Europe.” She told him. “First we will retake my home, Castillo Yew. We will rally our forces, rally many powerful names under our banner. We will forge new alliances, we will make and conquer new enemies. We will establish a New World Order.”

“We?”

Amaris smiled at him.

“Of course.” She purred, as she squeezed his hand. “We.”

He was dizzy and weak. He had spent the entire trip the airport being fed on. He simply wanted to crawl into bed and fall asleep. Amaris assured him that he would be given the chance to rest once they were in the air and in the clear.

In the clear? She made this sound like a good thing. Like it was something he wanted.

Amaris sat with her legs crossed, her leg bouncing up and down energetically. She seemed positively elated. Mike had never seen her so happy.

“It will not be much longer now…” She said to him, smiling. “We-“

“Attention all passengers.”

Amaris turned her up upward, suddenly alert.

“There is a situation outside. Please remain where you are until we give the all clear. Thank you.”

It did not seem to be an emergency. No one around them seemed to pay the announcement any mind. Amaris, however, felt differently. Honing her senses, she tried to get a feel for what was going on outside.

“She’s here.”

She stood up and grabbed hold of Mike’s collar. He yelped as he was dragged to his feet.

“Change of plans.” She told him. “We’re taking a plane for ourselves.”

She ignored the stares as she dragged Mike along down the aisle.

“Ugh, I’ve never had to steal a plane before.” Amaris complained, as her eyes flickered all over the room. “Oh, what’s the best way to go about this…”

She turned towards the direction that the planes were in and raised her hand. A powerful burst of energy burst outward and into the wall, blowing it to pieces. Screams filled the room. Amaris brushed her hair backward as she wrapped her arms around Mike.

“Stay still.” She warned him, as she they leapt downward. Mike felt an intense push of air against them as they descended, before gently landing on the ground below.

“Perhaps I should carry you the whole way.” Amaris joked, as she set him back down. “This would certainly go a little bit faster.”

Mike said nothing. Amaris raised her hand again and blew a hole through another wall. She wrapped her hand around his and led him down the airport.

Employees stared at them horrified as they stepped across the runway. “Oh, I don’t know a thing about planes.” Amaris complained, as she ran her eyes over the one that they were loading with luggage. Will that one do?” She ignored the protests of the employees as she led Mike into the plane. The entryway slid shut behind them.

“This can’t be too hard to figure out.” Amaris said, as they entered the pilot’s seat. “We only need to get there… we don’t need to land.”

She began messing around with the dials and buttons. Mike watched with tight lips.

“This is impossible.” Amaris proclaimed, after a while. “I’d love to stop and learn, but we’re in a hurry…”

She turned back around and the door opened back up. They waited a while, and immediately a man stepped inside.

“Stop-“ Amaris gave him a look, and he immediately pulled away, eyes wide.

“Hey, can you help us?” Amaris asked him. “We’re trying to take off, but-“

“Yes of course.” The man said quickly, as he stepped forward. “I would be happy to…”

He stepped forward into the cockpit. Amaris, pleased, lead Mike into the passenger cabin and sat him down in a chair.

“Stay.” She told him sharply, wagging her finger at him, as she headed up to the Pilot’s quarters. She could sense Soleil approaching. It was time to leave.

…

Chaos reigned in the airport.

“What’s going on?”

“Terrorists?”

“I’m scared…”

“The police are on the way!”

Soleil gunned the engine and launched herself forward. She landed on the car, and then bounced upward, over the fence. She soared up and over the other side and touched down on the runway. The sound of sirens came from all sides behind her, but none were on this side of the fence.

She took off, her eyes wildly scanning the area. In a state of emergency no plane would ever take off. So that would mean that the one plane that would take off was-

She saw it. Despite everything that had happened, a plane was slowly moving down the runway. She sped up, as fast as she was

able, and tried her best to catch up to it. The passenger door opened mid motion, to her surprise. The limp body of a man was thrown unceremoniously from the passenger door. Soleil hurriedly darted out of the way while maintaining her speed. Unfortunately there was no one to save. The man was already dead. It was not Mike. He had to still be onboard.

The door slowly began to close shut. Sensing an opportunity Soleil reached into her bag and pulled out a grapple gun. It was a high powered tool used to fire hooks into objects that she could swing from.

Despite the speed of Gloria's bike, the plane was well on its way to taking off. She had to be fast and precise. She really did only have one shot… and since the accelerator was on the right side, she had to use her off hand. She raised the weapon and pointed it at the closing door. The hook shot forward, trailing a rope behind it. Soleil grit her teeth, hoping that the gun was powerful enough to work.

It slid into the closing door and the hook burst open as the door shut completely, entrapping the rope into the door. Soleil immediately discarded the gun, and wrapped the rope around her wrist as the plane began to lift off. Soleil spent the last few moments tightening the rope around her wrist before leaping upward off the motorcycle and into the air. The bike ran for a while before loosing its balance and falling over in a sickening crash. Soleil gritted her teeth as the sheer force of the plane's momentum hit her like a truck. Even with her strength, she found it difficult to pull herself upward, hand over fist, up closer to the plane. The wind slammed her into her helmet. If it wasn't for the visor blocking her eyes, they would probably have been pushed out of her skull.

Despite the frightfulness of the task before her, Soleil persevered. She pulled herself up, inch by inch, little by little, until she was up closer to the door. She gritted her teeth and prepared herself for the last stetch-

Only for the door to suddenly lower again, sending her tumbling downward!

Soleil reacted quickly. She reached in her bag and reached for a grappling hook. She threw it to the side as the first grappling hook came loose. The new hook barely managed to find its mark attaching it to the tail of the plane before Soleil felt a strong jolt. She cried out as the plane jolted far ahead of her, leaving her trailing behind it like a ribbon. She had not had time to wrap the rope around her hand this time. This time only the strength of a single hand was keeping her aloft. She flinched as the hook from the gun swung back and hit her in the head. It bounced harmlessly off of her helmet and trailed behind her.

Sweat poured down her face as she desperately tried to reach for the rope in front of her with her free hand. She fumbled with it several times. It was simply too far to reach. She strained herself to wrap her hand around the other. She rested for a moment, and then slowly pulled herself up, wrapping her hand in the rope as she went.

"Tenacious, aren't you?"

Soleil looked up in horror. Standing on the very tip of the plane's tail was Amaris Yew. She was staring down at her with some mild amusement. Her foot was gently toying with the embedded hook right below her. "You are brave, Blade." She called down to her. Her voice seemed to somehow be amplified. Soleil could hear her clearly despite the roar of the plane's engines and the sheer force against her ears.

"Do not worry, Soleil." Amaris told her. "I'll be sure to send flowers to your Mother once you fall." She watched her for a while, smiling serenely as Soleil desperately clambered forward, trying to close the distance between her and the plane.

Soleil didn't actually believe she could kill Amaris. But she knew she had to try. She tried to speak, but the words could not come out. She was simply under too much pressure. She pulled herself upward, inch by inch, as Amaris watched her with a coy expression on her face. Soleil was trying not to panic. She could not fall. Otherwise she would never reach Mike.

Mike.. getting him back was her goal. She didn't NEED to enter the plane…

She twisted herself in midair to reach around her for her leg. She grabbed a gun and hoisted it. Amaris scoffed.

"Go ahead, shoot me." She spread her arms wide, her chest popping forward. Soleil ignored her. She lowered the gun and aimed more to the left… around the side of the plane. She struggled to find the best possible angle, and then placed her finger on the trigger.

She fired.

Amaris' smugness turned to absolute horror as the bullet shot forward, along the plane, and then suddenly jolted to the side. It ripped into the window at an angle, shattering it. An intense pressure came from the cabin.

"Mike!" Amaris cried out, horrified. In a flash she was gone, phasing through the hull of the plane itself to reach him. Soleil gritted her teeth, waiting patiently, as the door to the plane was ripped open.

Amaris, her arms tightly wrapped around Mike, threw them both over the side of the plane, into the blue sky below. Soleil gritted her teeth, not even considering her actions, as she let go of the rope.

"No you don't!"

Amaris screeched as Soleil slammed into her from behind, throwing her off balance. They spun around in midair several times. So many in fact that Soleil quickly lost sight of which way was up. Amaris snarled wildly as she tried to claw at Soleil's helmet. She bent her head to keep her away from the visor, and raised her fist.

Amaris could not pull herself away from the blow. Soleil struck her across the face so hard she went flying across the sky. Soleil straightened her body and sped up her descent. She reached Mike and wrapped her hands around him. He was, thankfully, unhurt, but shaken.

"Don't move." She commanded, as she wrapped her arms around him protectively. The two of them were rapidly descending on a vast

expanse of forest. Soleil could see a vast, dark shadow rapidly flying back towards them.

She couldn't worry about that now. She had to focus on the landing.

"Brace yourself." She warned him, as the trees neared. She bent her legs and pushed them outward in front of her, to the branches. Amaris came flying at them, hands outstretched, a terrible grimace on her face.

"Ha!"

She shot her hand forward and grabbed hold of the other girl. Amaris yelped as Soleil's iron grip tore into her skin. Soleil felt them slowing to a crawl, as Amaris' weight coupled with her flight acted as a form of makeshift parachute.

She pulled away from Amaris as she reached the branches of the trees. She gracefully stepped down onto one, and then jumped forward to a lower branch. She quickly and efficiently leapt downward to the ground below, holding a shaking pale Mike.

"Holy shit." He breathed. "Holy shit."

When they hit the ground she let go of Mike, and he staggered away from her, looking a little sickly. Soleil could not blame him. She was a little shaken too.

"Are you alright?" She asked concerned, as she stepped towards him. Before she could get an answer, however, a shadow descended upon them.

"What a move, Blade."

Amaris was standing on a tree branch above them, looking down on them. Her expression was more stoic than it had been before. There was no sign of her previous mirth. "Truly I have not been so impressed with your family in over a hundred years. You do not possess Odette's prodigy, yet I daresay you have far more steel and grit."

"Thank you." Soleil said. "You would know better than anyone, I suppose." Amaris smiled as she stepped over the branch and gently

floated down the ground below. Mike backed away from her, clearly horrified.

“I truly admire you, Soleil.” Amaris told her. “Eloi would have killed the boy the instant he became aware of him, yet you have gone to great extremes to try and protect him from me.” A dark shadow covered her face, obscuring it from view. “You possess Solana’s compassion, yet you are not as naïve as she was.”

Her limbs seemed to elongate and lengthen and expand. Amaris seemed a little bit taller. Soleil tilted her head back.

“My enemies are vampires.” Amaris told her. “And you are a Vampire Hunter. There is no reason for us to fight. I would have been honored to fight back your side, Soleil Blade.” She raised her long arm. Her hand had shifted into an intimidating looking claw. “I do not truly wish to kill you. But I will if I must.”

“Mike.” Soleil told him, as she clenched her hand into a fist. “Run.”

He did not need to be told twice. He staggered off into the woods. The girls stared at each other.

“I will find him and make him mine as soon as I leave your corpse for the crows.” Amaris told her. The inflection of her voice had shifted from that of a playful young girl to a raspy threat of a demon.

“I will find him and allow him to live a happy life…” Soleil drew a sword and brandished it in front of her threateningly. “One that you will not be a part of.”

There was no sound in the forest. All of the animals and birds had flew when they had come crashing into their home. It was eerily quiet as Amaris’ shadow fell over her.

Soleil cried out as tiny hands burst forward out of Amaris shadow and wrapped around her legs. She had no time to react as Amaris appeared in front of her, an inch away from her face. She reached forward, wrapped her arms around Soleil’s neck.

"You are beautiful." Amaris told her huskily, as Soleil struggled, trying not to meet Amaris' eye. She was staring intently at her. The shadowy hands on Soleil's legs bound her almost completely.

"Snap out of it Soleil!"

Amaris shot a look towards Mike, who was standing some distance away, hiding behind a large tree. Soleil had not needed the advice, but she appreciated the distraction.

She burst forward, smashing her head against Amaris' in a vicious headbutt. She relinquished her hold on her as she staggered backward. Soleil, still struggling with her legs, grabbed hold of Amaris arms and used her core strength to lift the vampire up and over her head.

Soleil screamed as she bent back, and then slammed Amaris back into the ground. She reached for her bag, only to realize with horror that one of the hands had untied it and let it drop to the ground.

Amaris floated upwards gracefully, staring at her intently. She landed on her feet, her red eyes glowing with an evil light. Her gaze was penetrating.

"A woman of true strength." She commended. "But I fear that your strength is nothing compared to mine."

The hands crawled further up her leg and onto her thigh. Soleil squirmed uncomfortably as the hands began to crawl across her hip.

These hands were made of shadows… if she just had some light, she could get rid of them.

"Mike!" She cried. "Shine me with your phone flashlight!"

He recoiled, giving her a horrified look. He did not move. Soleil immediately regretted asking him to step in. She had done nothing but make him a target. Amaris however, did not seem interested in subduing him.

"Oh, Soleil…" She purred. "There will be no knight in shining armor coming to save you." One of the hands squeezed her bottom. She gave a sharp cry, clenching her fist in rage. Amaris giggled.

“You’re so fun to tease.” She said as she stepped closer to her, her wild black hair falling across her face. Soleil flinched as the other woman came closer to her, raising a soft, beautiful hand to her cheek. “But thy life must end.”

She lurched forward and tore her teeth into Soleil’s neck. Soleil felt an intense pleasure flow through her entire body. She let out a deep moan as she threw her head backward, as Amaris wrapped her arm around her head.

“No!”

She headbutted her again, and Amaris pulled away with a lurch- a small portion of Soleil’s neck in her mouth. Soleil gasped in pain as a large portion of blood dripped down her neck. She did not want to imagine just what the state of her neck was in.

Amaris growled at her. “You ARE stubborn.” She said to her darkly. “Submit.”

Soleil glowered at her as she raised her fists. “No.”

A small, bright light shined at her from a distance. Amaris jolted, her eyes flickering over to Mike. His phone was raised, and its small light was pointed straight at Soleil.

“HA!”

She burst from the shadows, tearing through them like paper and closed the small distance between them. Her hand smashed against Amaris’ cheek, and she went flying into a nearby tree, slamming into it so hard the trunk snapped.

“Ha!”

Soleil leapt forward, her leg prepared to arch into a series of mighty kicks. Amaris stood up on the side of the trunk and looked up, snarling, as Soleil caught her with her leg with a crescent kick. Amaris went spinning through the air and slammed back into the ground.

Soleil stepped back on one leg,  trying to calm her nerves. Once again Amaris rose, seemingly unphased by the blows. Soleil tried not

to think of the state her own neck was in. Amaris stood there, her head hung limply in front of her. Her hair completely obscuring her face.

"You… think me a monster…?"

She looked up, baring her teeth at her. Her face, formerly so beautiful, had shifted into something completely freakish and alien. Soleil, battle hardened as she was, almost froze on the spot.

"But know that I am much more."

Amaris charged at her again. Soleil stood her ground, and punched out at her, trying to knock her down, but Amaris' head had someone hardened. Amaris didn't even flinch upon contact while Soleil's hand felt as if she had punched a particularly hardy wall. Amaris slammed into her with her full weight, and Soleil was slammed to the ground with a harsh thud. Amaris bent her head over her again, and once more she pressed her lips against her neck.

"HA!"

Soleil raised her legs to her stomach and then pushed them outward, catching Amaris in the stomach. She recoiled slightly as Soleil quickly reached up and grabbed hold of her ears.

Amaris screeched in pain as Soleil twisted them, and then threw her off of her. She leapt up to her feet just in time to see Amaris moving in to grab her. Soleil quickly made a short low kick to her face. Amaris took the blow on the nose. The characteristic black blood of vampires poured out of her nose, but it did not stop her from grabbing her leg. Soleil cried as the powerful grip of her clawed hand crushed her leg. She staggered, leading to Amaris easily knocking her off of her feet.

"Soleil!" Mike cried, horrified. Soleil gritted her teeth and again tried to fight off Amaris' head.

Soleil managed to smack her away before backing away from her. Amaris crawled after her on all fours, looking rather like a lizard hunting down its prey. Soleil wished she still had her bag. She was

not even sure where it was now. She had lost track of it during the fighting.

"Come to me lover…" Amaris moaned, as she advanced. Her legs seemed to bend forward at the knee to give her crawl more force behind it. Soleil found herself pressed up against a tree as Amaris reached her.

She shakily climbed to her feet, placing her hand against the tree, and tried to kick at her again. But this time Amaris' head darted neatly tot the side. Soleil quickly pulled back and struck again, but Amaris avoided that blow too and leapt up, pressing her against the tree. Soleil recoiled as Amaris leaned up close to her, restraining her arms as she leaned in for another vampire kiss.

Soleil kicked out at her violently as the strong feelings of pleasure once again began to fill every pore in her body. She screamed in pain and frustration as she continued lashing out at Amaris, each blow weaker than the last. She could feel herself getting dizzy…

Something thudded into Amaris from behind. She pulled away a little, glancing behind. Mike was there, his arms wrapped around her warped and twisted waist, tugging fiercely.

"What are you doing?" Amaris breathed on him. Mike cried out in fear, but did not let go. A strong feeling of pride rose up in Soleil.

"HA!"

She pushed herself off the tree and slammed her head into Amaris' once again. Mike jumped out of the way as Amaris went rolling along the ground. Soleil staggered forward, her vision cloudy.

"My weapons…" She told Mike, her voice raspy. "Where are my weapons?"

Mike stared at her openmouthed before scuttling off somewhere else. His eyes were roving around the ground. Soleil grimaced as she took a pained step closer to Amaris.

She was beautiful again. Soleil wasn't sure whether she had really transformed back into her more human form or whether she was

hallucinating. Amaris smiled warmly as she beckoned a finger towards her.

"I'll… win…" Soleil told her hoarsely, trying to sound far stronger than she actually felt. "I will defeat you!"

She took another staggered step forward, fighting to keep her eyes open. Amaris stood watching her, her eyes looking almost sultry.

"Come to bed, Soleil." She said softly. "It's time for you to rest."

Soleil felt her head become even heavier. She fought to stay awake. "No… I have too much to accomplish…"

"You are exhausted, and want nothing more than to sleep." Amaris told her gently. "Give in to that feeling. Because you deserve it."

Soleil almost fell asleep right there, but she persevered somehow. Mike was depending on her. She couldn't give in. Not now. Not ever.

Amaris considered her for a moment. "You are stubborn." She repeated, stroking her chin. She stepped closer to her again, slowly. Soleil raised her arms up to defend herself. "Far more than Solana was." She smiled. "She allowed me to have her. She enjoyed it."

Soleil fight a fire rise up in side of her. She suddenly felt wide awake.

"I am not Solana." She said. "I am not weak." She got into a more firm fighting position. Amaris sighed, shaking her head.

"You are stubborn." She repeated, sounding a little frustrated. "But it will all be over soon. By the time Mike and I conquer Europe, you will be a Vampire."

Soleil grimaced.

"You will be more than welcome to join me when that time comes." Amaris continued. "Please do not end up like Sonny the Smile… I would hate to have to torture you in the most painful way possible." She smiled. "Oh, you're in quite a lot of pain right now, aren't you? Maybe I should take a look at you…"

She stepped forward, almost like a strut. Soleil braced herself for the inevitable bite.

“Stop!”

Amaris stopped. She glanced towards the side at Mike. Soleil’s bag lay at his feet, and he shakily raised a gun upwards at her.

“Get away from her!”

Amaris gave him a look. “Love.’ She said. “How long have we been together? Were you not paying attention when I told you that bullets don’t even sting? You have more of a chance of dying from a wasp than I have of being killed by that.” She sounded cool and relaxed.

Mike’s hand shook. Amaris rolled her eyes. “You can’t stop me, Mike.” She told him impatiently. “Either you choose to be with me… or you can be my slave. Your choice.”

She paused, letting the threat sink in.

“Put the gun down.” She commanded, harshly. She turned her attention back to Soleil, not even waiting for a response from him. “Soleil…” She breathed, biting her lip as she approached. “You have no idea how much I want you…”

She reached out her arms out to her, smiling seductively. Soleil again prepared herself for the worst.

“Made muh choice!”

The strongly muffled sound came from Mike’s direction. Amaris whirled around, horrified as Mike fingered the trigger of a gun that was placed firmly in his mouth.

“No!” Amaris screamed, completely taken aback. “Don’t you dare!”

“Get away from her!” Mike told her, as he stepped forward, standing between Amaris and Soleil. Soleil stared at him, horrified, as he reassuringly gripped her hand with his free one.

Amaris dared not move. She stared a them, anger and confusion written all over her face, as Mike gently pushed Soleil backward, further into the forest, away from her.

“Mike…” Soleil murmured. “You… don’t have to do this.”

“I want to.” He told her, his voice firm.

“So you betray me.” Amaris said, her voice ice cold. “I have been cheated on. You have chosen another woman. Shame on you.” She sounded disparaging. Mike flinched at her words.

“Do not listen to her.” Soleil encouraged. “She is trying to manipulate you.”

“You don’t truly wish to die, my love.” Amaris said to him, her voice dripping with honey. “You have so much to live for. Please… if nothing else, at least come with me to Europe.”

She held her hand out to him welcomingly. “It is a beautiful land.” She insisted. “Full of fields and lakes and hot chicks. Most young American Men would not be able to afford to go. But you… you’re special.”

“She’s trying to manipulate you Mike.” Soleil warned him. “Do what you must.” Mike’s hand was shaking. Soleil sympathized. She knew how hard it was to for ordinary people to resist the allure of vampires. It was incredible that he could even manage this much.

Soleil staggered in front of him and brandished her fists. “What will it be, Yew?” She asked. “Either you stay and fight me, and lose your prize…”

She brandished her fists. “Or you leave us.” She said. “Forever.” Amaris’ eyes flickered in between the two of them, clearly weighing her options.

“It seems I have lost.” She conceded, flipping her hair back. “Or perhaps a draw is a more apt way to put it.”

She leaned forward, staring at Mike. “I still care about you sweetie.” She said. “Please… keep me in your thoughts, okay?”

She took a step backward, into the dark trees, and vanished. A large black bird soared high above them and out of sight.

The two stood there in silence for several minutes, hardly daring to believe she had gone.

“Ugh.”

Soleil's legs finally gave out and she collapsed, face first. Mike immediately rushed to her side, lowering the gun.

"Hey are you okay?"

Soleil grimaced as she was helped up. "No." She told him roughly. "I… need another hospital…"

Mike wrapped his arms around her protectively. "Come on, stay with me now." He said. "Soleil? Soleil?"

She did not answer.

Chapter 13

Mike stood on the roof of the building, overlooking the vast expanse of city before him. He was thinking about everything that had happened. About Amaris. How they met. How it ended. The people she was involved with. And what kind of person she really was.

He donned his coat and turned around, heading back into the building. He stepped through the immaculate, clean hallways and made his way back to Soleil's room.

"Feeling any better?"

She gave him a look as he sat down.

"Very." She told him. "I can't wait to leave."

"That anxious to get back to school?"

"I'm not going back."

"Really?"

Soleil shook her head. "There's no point." She said. "Amaris is gone. My work here is done."

"I thought you would stick around a while longer." Mike said, a little disappointed. "I mean… what if Amaris comes back?"

"She likely won't." Soleil said. "You've broken free of her control. As long as you take certain precautions, it would be too much of a hassle for her to bother with you. She still has her enemies to contend with, after all."

“And if something does happen?” Mike asked cautiously.

“Call me.” Soleil said simply.

The precautions, Mike quickly realized, were extremely convenient and quickly became engrained in his habits. Simply sitting at home and thinking about how Amaris wasn’t welcome was more than enough to keep her from coming into his house. That, on top of certain objects that Soleil recommended he carry around with him, along with the Mark of the Wolves, guaranteed him safety.

Not only was it possible to stay away from Amaris Yew…. It was very easy. He simply needed to have the will for it to happen.

He went to visit Soleil regularly. He had not realized just how badly she had been injured during the fights. She had not even fully healed from the fight with Gloria before going after Amaris, getting shot for her trouble, and then immediately heading out to save him.

“You’re really going home then?” Mike asked her. Soleil nodded.

“Yes.” She said. “I need to recover… and besides, Amaris probably did leave for Spain. I need to be prepared for her next move.”

“Her next move?” Mike repeated, a little taken aback. “Soleil, you aren’t even out of the hospital.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” Soleil asked blankly. Mike sighed. He was beginning to realize that Soleil was a true workaholic.

Days passed. Mike continued with his visits, and eventually Soleil was feeling up to getting out of bed. They took walks together and spoke at length about Amaris Yew, and everything that they had gone through together.

“I really liked her.” Mike said wistfully, one day while they were standing in an empty park. Dying leaves blew around their feet from the force of the wind. “I felt as if… she was the best thing to happen to me.” He mustered a laugh. “I was stupid, huh?”

“No.” Soleil told him. “You were in love.”

Mike met her eyes, surprised. Soleil looked past them.

“Look.”

He did look. Another couple was standing some distance away, under a tree. They were laughing and holding hands. Mike felt his heart twinge as he watched them.

“They’d do anything for each other.” Soleil told him, her voice low, as if she were trying to prevent herself from being overheard. “They’re young, but they are committed to each other all the same.” She said to him. “You were no different.”

“What?”

“You wanted to help Amaris.” Soleil told him. “You wanted to care for her, and complete her. But she threw you away.”

Soleil stepped closer to her.

“She was the one who made a mistake.” She told him. “You ae wonderful. You can find someone a thousand times better than Amaris Yew. You mustn’t let yourself dwell on what happened to her.”

Mike turned his eyes downward.

“You’re right…. Of course.” He said. “I…” He rubbed his eyes. “Thank you, Soleil.”

Soleil did not leave for France immediately after she had been discharged from the hospital. She wanted to do one last thing first.

Mike led Soleil into the cemetery with a solemn expression. They were both carrying flowers. They had each spent a pretty penny buying vast bouquets.

They came to a small, almost unmarked grave and stopped, staring at it.

Taylor Bell

August 21th 2000 to November 17th, 2018

“Sorry we’re late Taylor.” Mike said to the grave apologetically. “I… wish we could have come to the funeral.”

Soleil said nothing. She had bent her head and seemed to be praying. Mike fell silent, not wanting to offend her.

They stood there for almost fifteen minutes before Soleil spoke again.

"This was my fault…" She whispered. "Taylor died because of me."

"That's not true." Mike said immediately. "Taylor-" Soleil shook her head.

"I should have done more." She told him. "I should have been stronger. I should have protected her."

"You did!" He told her. "As best as you were able."

"My best wasn't good enough." Soleil sniffed.

"Soleil…" Mike was not sure what to say. "Sometimes… terrible things happen, and we just have to deal with it."

She didn't look to be calming down. Mike felt he wasn't very good at this. But Soleil nodded.

"You are right, of course…" She said gently. "Life goes on."

"Yeah!" Mike said, a little too energetically. "Listen, Soleil… I'm to be blamed just as much as you. I allowed myself to be used by…" He swallowed. "Her… and that's why-"

"You're right of course." Soleil said again, her voice distant. "I told you that mustn't blame yourself." She took in a deep breath. "I must try not to blame myself either."

They stood there for a while longer.

"I liked Taylor." Soleil told him. "I do not make friends easily, but I enjoyed the short time we had together."

"I liked her too." Mike told her. "She was… she always will be one of my closest friends." Soleil gave him a sad look, wondering whether she should tell Mike how Taylor really felt about him. Perhaps it would be better if that stayed a secret.

"She was…." Soleil tried to put her feelings into words. "She was very eager to help you." She recalled. "I liked that about her. She

was brave and kind, and willing to do just about anything to save you." She fell silent for a moment. "She cared about you a lot." She said.

The wind blew again, pushing some more leaves across the cemetery.

"I wish…" Mike tried to find the words. "I wish it didn't have to be this way."

Little flakes of snow began to fall down on top of their heads. Mike looked up, a little bit surprised.

"It's still a bit early in the year for snow." He said. Soleil watched him intently, before giving a sudden start.

"Snow?" She said. "Really?"

"Yes, really." He told her, surprised. "Does it not snow in France?"

"Not often." Soleil told him. "Do you think it'll be enough to go skiing?"

"Skiing?"

Mike crossed his arms, thinking deeply. "I don't know how to ski. I've only ever gone sledding. And snowboarding, once."

"Skiing is really fun." Soleil told him. "I have gone only once in my life. I will never forget it."

Mike smiled at her. It was a wide genuine smile. Soleil gave him a smile back.

"I've never seen you smile before." Mike told her. For the first time he found himself noticing just how pretty she actually was. "You love skiing that much?"

She raised her hand to cover her mouth, a little embarrassed. "W-well it's a very happy memory!"

"Tell me."

She stepped away from him, hand still clutched over her mouth.

"Hey, come on!"

She broke out int a sort of fast walk.

“Soleil!”

She chased after her. Laughing, she broke out into the cemetery and out into the street. An older couple passing by gave her a startled look as she turned and ran down the sidewalk. Mike was not far behind. The couple gave them a startled look as he chased her down the street.

“Wait up!”

It was at that moment that Soleil realized something. Despite everything Mike had gone through, despite everything he had given to Amaris Yew and lost, despite losing Taylor, despite all of that there was one simply truth.

He was going to be just fine.

End